

VOLUME THREE • NUMBER TWO • SUMMER 1982

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**The Jesuit Educational  
Center for Human Development**



**Refounding Religious Vocations**



**Mourning is a Healing of the Heart**



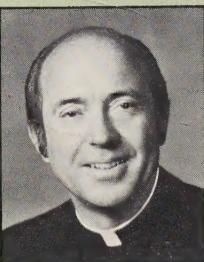
**Psychospiritual View of Masturbation**



**Self-Image Damaging to Priests**



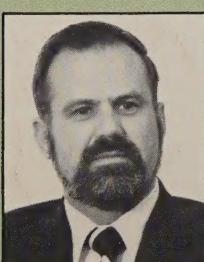
**Is There a Different Drummer?**



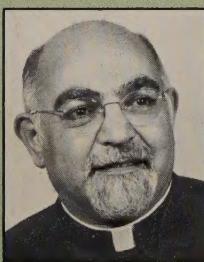
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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide names of author(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Illustrations, if any, should be submitted as high-quality, glossy, unmounted black-and-white photographic prints. Do not send original artwork.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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# EDITORIAL

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## DEVELOPMENT—A MATTER OF INITIATIVE

This spring I had the chance to visit U.S. Air Force bases in Japan, Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines, giving a series of workshops on the art of coping with service-connected stress. I was impressed by the high level of morale, the state of military preparedness, and the degree of dedication manifested by so many fine men and women in blue uniforms. Especially apparent were the deep, rich humanity and pastoral effectiveness of the chaplains. Disappointing, however, was the discovery that despite all the programs made available to enrich the after-work hours for young Americans stationed overseas—lessons in photography, woodwork, ceramics, languages, and regional culture, university level courses—the vast majority fail to take advantage of them. Base officers keep adding to the list of opportunities and find themselves frustrated, unable to marshall a widespread enthusiasm for self-development on the part of the young people in their care.

I returned home to find on my desk a report prepared by the World Food Council, a U.N. agency, stating its recent conclusion that the three quarters of a billion people who are currently underfed should no longer be receiving direct food aid, except in emergencies. The reason? Such help only serves to make underdeveloped countries dependent on imports at a time when they should be doing everything possible to increase their own productivity. Commenting on the report, foreign affairs writer Flora Lewis has observed: "The lesson is that there is no substitute for encouraging

farmers to grow food and sell it. . . . with a lot more people in the world, no other problem can be solved until they grow a lot more food. Those who know how can best help by enabling them to help themselves."

The situation on the air bases and the condition of the undernourished world serve to remind us all, once again, that when development of others is our goal, we had better be very clear about our role. It is to assist rather than to achieve. Our most important task is to help them dig down deep into their own souls and find the motivation to work for their own improvement. Once their desire is enkindled, we can then provide help to make their attainment of their goals possible. This is as true for teachers as it is for parents, for athletic coaches, for pastors. All successful human development is a matter of personal initiative. Passive receptivity, no matter how sizable the contribution, will never make a person or a nation grow.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Mourning in Japanese

The entire Fall 1981 issue was beautiful—especially the article on intimacy. Also the one on midlife mourning. I did my best to put most of it into Japanese for a talk at our recent chapter, and the sisters enjoyed it. Talking about our common problems brought us closer together.

Sister Mary Pius, O.S.C.  
Gumma-Ken, Japan

## Greeley's Answer Not Needed

While I would agree with most of Peter Cantwell's article, "Ongoing Growth Through Intimacy" (Fall 1981), I think the author makes one understandable but basically serious mistake. He does not distinguish between the personal intimacy of loving friendship and the sexual intimacy, which fatally assumes a personal intimacy, which is more often than not lacking. Nowhere is this failure more damaging than in trying to define or build loving community—the great need in religious life today. In fact, any religious community that is unloving forfeits its right to be called Christian. But that love is always and only personal, the love of personal caring, not the so-called love of sexual or even physical intimacy.

As for me, I would hope that all our little games played with our pseudofreedom just before and since Vatican II have matured us enough to recognize that sexual intimacy per se never leads to personal love or intimacy, but rather disillusionments the players. Gerard Foure put it very well several years ago when he said that "if we have not experienced our amourettes at eighteen they are very painful at thirty-eight."

Although Father Cantwell wisely requires for such intimacy two people with a reasonable and healthy sense of their own identity, a third person for reference, nonexclusivity, and solitary prayer, he cops out with the question: "How far can or should celibates go in their expression of affection for each other; i.e., what degree of psychological or physical intimacy is appropriate?" He then compounds the folly of his question by referring the

matter to, of all people, pan-expert, sociologist (not psychologist, not physiologist, nor even spiritual authority) Andrew Greeley. Greeley's answer is indeed worthy of him: "We have to wait for suitable answers to emerge." I cannot help wonder how long the line of waiters will be, waiting on Greeley to make up his mind. That undoubtedly is the reason that so many just could not wait and so left, only to find need for the same questions in their fugitive marriages. What is personal love? The answer has been around for a very long time, and it is not as ponderous a question as most of our experts have made it. Any truly religious man or woman (a Christian, perhaps) could take a shot at it.

Unfortunately for this article, Father Cantwell restricts himself to "mixed, celibate friendships," when the same principles apply equally to all friendships, heterosexual or homosexual. He chooses to blame the past while not delineating a future that, while aware of past mistakes, would lay out the loving future efficacious friendships require if "they are to recognize by your love that you are My disciples." Content to wait on Greeley for answers, Cantwell meanwhile states, with implied censure, the statistical evidence that would satisfy a sociologist or a psychologist, but not a Christian. He says: "Not only did the life-style of this system tend to undermine the development of identity and consequently of intimacy, but intimacy itself was virtually outlawed. Friendships were suspect, and any form of closeness to another carried immediate innuendoes of inappropriate sexual behaviour." Surely these suspicions did not preclude homosexuality. Nonetheless, those of us who have survived those times and that so-called training know of many mature individuals who developed deep and lasting friendships with both men and women, while recognizing the suspicious, emotional midgets for the underdeveloped personalities they were. Some of us recognized then that no matter how truly we were equipped for sex, we were much more abundantly equipped to love personally, were far more frustrated by not loving than by not copulating. In fact, most genuine celibates found true celibacy possible only when and if they were truly loving. As for those who prayed and recognized God as truth, it was not too hard to see the

error of the pseudospirituality that would make men and women celibates both sexless and unloving and therefore both subhuman and unchristian.

But what do we do for those waiting for Greeley's answer? First, we plead with them not to hold their breath while waiting. Then we tell them quite simply that we cannot tell them if they are sinning in their efforts to love, but we can certainly assure them that they do sin when they refuse to love, are too frightened to love (although their fear, especially if verging on terror, minimizes the guilt), or as the parable of the talents put it, they bury the talent so that they will not lose it.

Second, we have to get across that love is not intersexual but interpersonal, that the frightening, pseudosexual feelings of early personal intimacy when recognized, but neither indulged nor exploited, quietly subside as does the early sexual excitement of marriage in a very personally loving marital relationship in which genital sex finds its appropriate but not dominant place. Personal love is the ability to do everything to help another, nothing to harm the other, and as such banishes self-indulgence or exploitation. This applies even in parental or filial relationships, men with men, or women with women. The fact that men find it easier to relate to men and women to women because of common

gender and life experiences does not threaten their capacity to love the opposite sex, which they too often continue to discover more opposite than they ever dreamed possible.

Thus the loving community does not come through sexual or even personal intimacy but through the basic love involved in really caring about the other, his/her work, life, health (emotional and spiritual), and well-being. Of course, one should never become so involved in his/her own little world or work or friendships that no one else really matters. It takes loving people to make loving community. Loving people do not live off the community but in it and for it, to the degree that what they have and are willing to offer is acceptable. The tragedy of religious life as we have known it is the petty, personal jealousies, resentments, and antipathies that have dominated community life, neutering the apostolate of nearly every outstanding priest or religious. These people, like Christ, found that their enemies were those of their own household. Little wonder it all came tumbling down. Good riddance! I cannot believe that God is waiting for Greeley's answer for us to get going again.

John H. McGoey, S.F.M.  
Scarboro, Ontario, Canada

## Donating Your Blood

**D**uring the past several years the American Blood Commission has been attempting to establish a totally voluntary blood donation program. Success in accomplishing this aim would eliminate the practice of buying blood from donors who, wanting money, are likely to deny having contracted viral hepatitis, a highly communicable disease that could possibly kill the recipient of contaminated blood. Under the voluntary system that exists in most areas of the United States, patients are charged only for the cost of collecting, processing, and administering the blood. The blood itself is free, even if no family members or friends step forward to replace the blood that is transfused. The current philosophy in the field of blood donor recruitment is that every healthy eligible person has a responsibility to donate blood. Of the 220 million Americans, 90 million are eligible to donate blood, but unfortunately, only 5% to 7% of these actually donate regularly. Regrettable, too, is the fact that even though the nation is moving toward a totally voluntary donation system donors are not increasing in proportion to the growing need for transfusions of whole blood and blood components.

Most healthy people between the ages of 17 and 65 who weigh more than 110 pounds are eligible to donate blood. The donor's body temperature should be no higher than 99.5 degrees; pulse (heart rate) should be above 50 but below 100 beats per minute; blood pressure should fall between 90 and 180 for the systolic blood pressure and between 50 and 100 for the diastolic blood pressure. People with active infections or serious diseases (e.g., diabetics who require insulin) are rejected as donors. Some centers will not accept blood from people who have cancer or from those with convulsive disorders (e.g., epilepsy). Those who have traveled in a malaria-infected area must wait six months before donating; if antimalarial drugs were taken, a wait of three years is necessary. The body restores a donor's blood volume to normal within 24 hours; red cells take six weeks to replace. Eight weeks must elapse before the next donation. No one can donate more than five times in one year. Further information can be obtained from local hospitals, Red Cross chapters, blood banks, and the American Blood Commission, 1901 Ft. Myer Drive, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22209.

# REFOUNDING RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS

## Interview with Maurice Anglim, F.S.C.

The editors of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT are delighted to be able to present this recent conversation with Brother Maurice Anglim, who is director of the mountainside Sangre de Cristo Center, near Santa Fe, New Mexico. He generously carved several hours out of his busy schedule during an intensive 100-day renewal program to describe the nature of his work, the Center's programs, and the insights he is gaining as a result of his current ministry. Among other activities, Brother Anglim has served as a high school principal, assistant superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Chicago, and provincial of the Chicago Province of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He holds degrees in counseling psychology, pastoral counseling, philosophy, and education. A Christian Brother since 1942, he entered the congregation from Minneapolis, where he graduated from De la Salle High School. He attended St. Mary's College, in Winona, Minnesota, St. Louis University, and Loyola University, in Chicago.

**HD:** What sort of formation experience are you providing here at the Sangre de Cristo Center?

**Anglim:** Our principal program is a 100-day continuing formation session, which is offered twice a year. The group of men now participating makes the 40th we have worked with here over the past 20 years. We had attempted in other locations to renew Christian Brothers during sessions of 30 and 60 days, but we finally arrived at the conviction that to accomplish our aim we would have to set up something like a "second novitiate," which would last a full 100 days. By the time we started operating in 1961, however, a cultural shift was beginning to occur in religious life and the second novitiate concept didn't survive very long.

**HD:** Had the Christian Brothers been offering a comparable program somewhere else in the world?

**Anglim:** In Rome, but it was for an elite group of about 45 brothers at a time who were sent from all over the world with the expectation that they would become provincial administrators or fulfill comparable roles. For the vast majority, there was no equivalent program.

**HD:** How many Christian Brothers are there in the world?

**Anglim:** At present there are somewhere between 10,000 and 11,000; about 1,500 of them live and work in the United States. We celebrated our 300th year as a congregation last year, commemorating our foundation by St. John Baptist de la Salle in France.

**HD:** You said that the current program you offer evolved from a second novitiate concept. Can you tell us how?

**Anglim:** Yes. Formerly, it was like making the novitiate over again, that is, under the guidance of a small limited staff within the order, with close supervision, envelopment in silence, and so on. But in the early 1960s, it became less and less feasible

to work with a group on that level; the men couldn't accept it. The struggle experienced by the participants in the program as well as by those directing it resulted in a cry for adaptation. The outcome was a recasting of what the program was about. In the process we opened the sessions to outside faculty members. We invited all other orders of men to send their brothers and priests, and many from outside our own ranks came to benefit from our program.

There are pictures on a wall here at the Center that tell the story. The earliest photographs show small groups of Christian Brothers dressed in their religious habit, and later ones show people dressed in all kinds of garb, from all kinds of orders—and these are color photographs. Symbolically, the early ones were in black and white.

**HD:** Would you call this a program for men in midlife?

**Anglim:** Yes, in the sense that we generally only accept men between 35 and 50 years of age. We don't usually make exceptions to the lower limit, since we find that men younger than 35 have not faced a number of the issues we address. People 35 and older have usually developed a readiness and a need for the type of life evaluation and renewal we provide. In general, we are working with people who are in the middle of their religious life. At age 50 most men in religious orders have spent 25 active years. We must ask ourselves: What are the major issues to be faced by middle-aged persons who have been active in religious life for that many years?

**HD:** Are you convinced that people in this age bracket need religious renewal?

**Anglim:** There's no doubt about it. The men come with a definite sense of need. They have experienced so many shifts in theology, in psychology, in sociology, and in culture in general as well as in the subculture called religious life that it would be almost impossible for them not to sense a personal need for renewal. When in some cases the men cannot pinpoint what they need exactly, our experienced staff tries to help each individual identify the areas of his need. I think the attendance of between 900 and 1,000 people over the past 20 years would indicate that there is a general need and that it is being met here.

What we do in scheduling the elements of the 100-day session is to keep in mind the needs of midlife religious persons, as the participants themselves indicate these to us, and then try to help each individual in the program to focus on what his specific experiences are. For example, the first unit we offer is on spirituality in midlife. The staff puts before the men such questions as: What is your experience as a religious at midlife? What is your sense of your spirituality as a midlife religious? What are the elements of it? What are the pluses

and minuses of your experience at this point? What do they tell you about your God, your life, your prayer, your relationships?

We also conduct an exercise that helps participants make very explicit the current concerns in their lives. We look at the culture in which we live, both secular and religious; we look at our own lives and what has happened in them. Then we ask ourselves: All right, having looked at all of this, what am I concerned about at the present time? Not, what are my problems? That's a different question. Rather, what are my concerns, in the sense of what do I care about? What do I find myself raising as issues that I have a loving concern about?

**HD:** Can you give some examples of concerns men have at this stage of life as they come into your program?

**Anglim:** We ask our participants to list their concerns and then to prioritize them. Actually, their concerns range far and wide. Some are as personal as their own experiences of sexuality, friendship, and other types of relationships. Some are related to the future of their religious life. The recurrent needs we see are in the areas of interpersonal intimacy, prayer life, experience of God, church, contemporary society, justice, and peace. We continually modify the program to meet the changing needs of the people who come to us for renewal so that anyone who attended our program ten years ago could come back now and find it different in content and mode of presentation. A person who did this would also be at a different point in his own life, with different concerns, needs, and expectations. Because of the continuing evolution of our program it would be possible for someone to participate twice within a period of 10 or 15 years and each time derive rich but very different benefits.

**HD:** Have some in fact done that?

**Anglim:** Yes, some have. I asked one of them if this was a different program from the one he had experienced ten years ago. He seemed surprised that I should ask. He replied, "Well, sure. I'm a totally different person at this point in my life."

Another man making the program for a second time found it so totally different that it rather startled him. When he arrived he said that he soon found "only one faculty person who was here when I was at the Center before and he's doing a totally different thing." So it's interesting how much both a program like this and the participants change over a period as brief as ten years.

**HD:** How many men go through this 100-day program at one time?

**Anglim:** We can accommodate 28 persons, and we almost always have just about that number. Usually we have applicants signed up for all the rooms available anywhere from two to six months before the beginning date of the session.

# **What has been the operating foundation of your life, conscious and chosen or implicit but unrecognized?**

**HD:** What do you think of this location—near Santa Fe, in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains—for your programs?

**Anglim:** This site was originally chosen because it is close enough to an urban area but remote enough to provide privacy. Population has advanced toward us but not too much; we're still 12 miles outside the city. The climate, too, is ideal. We have sunshine 350 days a year. With about 700 acres of property, we are close enough to the cultural advantages of Sante Fe but secluded enough to enjoy a constant stillness, with a mountainside view of a spectacularly beautiful pastoral setting. We're fortunate to be able to arrange several "desert days" during the program. People can wander out into the mountains or into the desert below us or sit beside a brook and reflect in solitude on what the program or their life is bringing to their attention.

**HD:** It sounds as though your program provides refreshment, not just renewal.

**Anglim:** It does, but the term we prefer to use is refoundation. We invite men to look at what makes their lives work or not work. We say: What is it that you want to be doing with your life? Let's look at the center, the core, of your relationship with the Lord, with your ministry, and with others. Let's look at what you've been using as foundations for that.

We help them expand their vocabulary of prayer and their experience of prayer, their understanding of themselves and their style of relating with others in and out of community and apostolate, their understanding of the roots of present developments in the church and society, and so on. With the assis-

tance of an excellent visiting staff drawn from many disciplines and from many places, we encourage a thorough examination—aided by a regular rhythm of quiet time to reflect and pray—of each person's experience of his "real" life after 25 years or so of living as a religious. For some, understandings are opened and deepened; for others, the potential of personal strength is seen in a new light, or the experience of personal weakness is accepted more compassionately. Still others may view latent or undeveloped gifts and talents for the first time as doors opening to new life planning or career possibilities. The basic question is: What has been the actual operating foundation of your life, conscious and chosen or implicit but unrecognized? and What do you want to be now?

We keep asking our participants: How will you keep this experience at Sangre alive in your life? What will you take away from here that will affect the rest of your life? That's the refoundation element I'm speaking of.

**HD:** How can you provide a refoundation experience for a whole group of 28 going through your program at one time?

**Anglim:** Each individual arrives with a set of needs and expectations. The program itself embodies certain contents: input elements, processes, rhythms, etc. We point this out to the participants from the beginning, encouraging them to help focus the program as much as possible toward their own needs. We also ask participants to be constantly alert to the "third program" operational at Sangre, that is, the agenda the Spirit has for each person's experience of the 100 days. Therefore, the Sangre program is unique for each individual because each attempts throughout to bring his own particular expectations and the elements of the formal program into congruence with what he discerns to be the movement of the Spirit in the whole of his life so far. This, of course, is part of a lifelong process, but the Sangre program brings it into special focus in a variety of ways during the 100 days. Our hope is that the Sangre experience enables participants to continue engaging life at this level, if they are not already doing so.

We do have regular serious input from our "presenters"; I prefer this word to lecturer because our visiting staff does so much more by way of process, participation, and personal presence. But Sangre offers a great deal more than the input. We have special support groups operating throughout the program, a series of personal interviews, and so on. Our visiting staff encourages the personalizing of input sessions in both discussions and other conversations about issues someone may be interested in exploring further. One example is a recent series of presentations we had on the topic of life and career planning. Naturally, some of the instruments and processes used provoked a number of personal questions. About half of the people in the

program used this occasion to consult with the presenter individually.

**HD:** Are the personal interviews you mentioned a form of spiritual direction?

**Anglim:** For some, they can be that. They are analogous to the spiritual direction that is part of the individually directed eight-day retreat about half-way through the 100 days. For others, these interviews will simply help them to participate fully in all of the elements of the Sangre program. For most, the interviews are a genuine help toward an integrative understanding of what their lives as religious ministers have been so far and of what they may become in the future.

**HD:** Who are the members of your resident staff who conduct these regular interviews?

**Anglim:** There are four of us on the staff: Sister Bernadette Casey, a Sister of Mercy from New England and a graduate of the Institute of Formative Spirituality program at Duquesne; Brother Mark Gault, a Christian Brother from the Minnesota Province, who has completed the program of Ministry Training Services; and Brother Francis Fleming, a Sacred Heart Brother from the New Orleans Province, who is currently completing the Human Relations and Counseling Skills program of the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University in Chicago. We operate very much as a team. The decisions we make regarding the structure of the program, its movement, schedules, and the like, we make together. We have learned to communicate well and, more important, to keep an eye on one another's personal needs. By helping each member of our staff to live a more complete Christian life, we feel we are providing a model in our small community for the participants to imitate in the communities to which they will return.

**HD:** You are maintaining a community within a community. Isn't that divisive?

**Anglim:** I don't think it has that effect. We know we're here year round and they are here for only 100 days. There are personal needs we have that we must meet. When we need days off, for example, we simply notify the participants that the staff will be out all day. We also try to model on Sundays an observance of a day of rest, leisure, familylike sharing, especially of faith and worship, which can remind our participants that the sabbath is intended to provide occasion for sitting down and writing a letter to relatives or friends, for listening to some good music, or for reading an enriching book. Too many religious people have turned Sunday into a day that is just as fast paced and busy as all the other days in the week. Most of the men in our program recognize that they have regarded Sunday as a sort of catch-up day and that we have helped them to view it as a day of rest, a day of the Lord, a day of worship, a day of family. This is an

example of the kind of behavior modeling we hope we're putting across.

**HD:** You mentioned that reading deserves a place. But just on Sunday?

**Anglim:** Not at all. There is a lot of time throughout the program for reading some small part of the contents of our excellent library. We do, it's true, schedule several "reading mornings" for each session, which are to be used for nothing else. These times, however, are symbolic ways of getting our participants to ask: What place do I give to reading in my life? What kind of serious reading have I done? What kind of plan for serious reading would I like to develop? These are typical refoundation questions.

**HD:** What's another example of a refoundation question?

**Anglim:** How much quiet time is there in my life? During every morning we schedule an hour of quiet—that's all. Everything stops, and people go wherever they want to experience whatever quiet time means to them. For some it means reading; for some it means going out walking alone and reflecting; for some it means sitting silently and letting their gaze rest on the mountains in the distance; for some it means simply basking in the sun and letting whatever happens in their reflective mood happen; for some it means a quiet time of prayer. It's a time for interior as well as exterior quiet: quiet of soul, quiet to think about what's happening in my life here and where I'm going, quiet to take control of the new day.

**HD:** What are the topics or issues that you invite lecturers, or presenters, to cover or that members of the resident staff discuss?

**Anglim:** We begin with several days of orientation sessions, making clear the difference between a renewal and a refoundation approach to the program. Then we explain the rhythms of the program and clarify how we do what we do with the 100 days. After that we explore a spirituality of midlife. We ask such questions as: Where have you come from? Who are you? Who is your God? What is your prayer? That kind of examination is a lifelong thing. It's like taking a still picture of a moving object. Next we move into liturgical prayer where we face such questions as: What is the corporate community prayer of the Christian? Where does eucharistic worship fit into this? Where does the sacrament of reconciliation fit in? We focus on these concerns at the beginning because they are the instruments that enable the contact with the Holy Spirit and the kind of growth that will allow refoundation to take place.

Next we explore a theory of group dynamics that prepares the participants for coming together then and later on in support groups. All participants in these groups of about six or seven members discuss

value- and faith-sharing, experience some level of self-disclosure, and generally help one another understand the whole program. The groups are leaderless; that way all share the responsibility for progress rather than just one designated leader.

**HD:** You mentioned that the groups come together later on. In what connection?

**Anglim:** Once the groups are started, this process becomes another means of integrating the whole Sangre experience. Starting topics for the small groups usually come from the themes of the program.

**HD:** For example?

**Anglim:** We do some study of Scripture, but we do it from the point of view of spirituality rather than of exegesis. We discuss not so much what this or that passage means to the critical interpreter of Scripture, though that is important, but what it means for me personally, for my life work, for the way I relate to God and to people. At one level the presentations and discussions are helpful on this; at another level the support groups encourage a deeper, perhaps more personal, application of Scripture to my personal life.

**HD:** What are some of the other program elements that make up the 100 days?

**Anglim:** We draw from areas of theological, psychological, sociological, and what might be called general spiritual interest—a kind of cross-breeding of several sciences. We offer a personal journal workshop, which is not quite the same as psychiatrist Ira Progoff's "intensive journal" program, though it contains many of the same elements. Ours deals more with spirituality and the experience of being a religious. Because it brings a Christian perspective into conjunction with Jungian insights and includes the religious life background of a middle-aged person our journal workshop is a different experience overall.

Then we deal with elements of different styles and forms of prayer including the Pentecostal type, and we present a unit on the discernment of spirits, just before the start of the men's retreat.

**HD:** Is there any particular difference between the segments you schedule before the retreat and those you offer after it?

**Anglim:** Generally, the programs ahead of the retreat are related to an inward movement, seeking answers to questions such as: Who am I? Where have I been? What am I doing? Coming out of the retreat we move immediately into questions linked with the spirituality of involvement. For example: What is work in my life? How do I live out the vows I've taken? What is the relationship between work and love? What is the future of religious life? How am I experiencing religious life? The last half of our semester-long session includes units on contempo-

rary Christian ethics, community dynamics, and social issues and concerns. We wrap up the program by looking back and saying: All right, I have some understanding of the real me, of the life I have lived and want to live; I have some understanding of the world in which I live, of the people with whom I relate, and of the church in which I work and learn to meet my God. Having looked at all this, I recognize that in midlife I am vulnerable, perhaps faulted, but redeemed. I see reality with a fairly clear vision and without its having a darkening or somber effect on me.

So we end up with a unit that puts it all together by saying: You are now completing a 100-day Sangre session, which for you has been a unique program including whatever the Holy Spirit developed as an agenda at the start. Now where is it going to go? We title this last segment "The Vision of the Future in Faith and Hope." The men's attitude at the end is predictably: I hope that I can continue responding as I now find it possible to respond, being present to God, others, and myself as I have experienced being present during this recent period of time.

**HD:** What kinds of ministry do the men go back to?

**Anglim:** Some go back to teaching in college, high school, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, or elementary school programs—all over the world. Some return to child welfare work, others to basic Christian communities in Latin America, some to ministry in hospitals. Most of the priests return to parishes.

**HD:** You have priests in your program along with brothers?

**Anglim:** Yes, we started that about five years ago. At present we average two or three priests, diocesan and religious, in the program every year. The presence of priests has added an element of richness to the experience of the program for everyone.

**HD:** You mentioned earlier that Sister Bernadette Casey is on your resident staff. Are there women among the visiting lecturers?

**Anglim:** About half of those on the presenting staff are women.

**HD:** Do any women come as participants to your 100-day programs?

**Anglim:** Not yet. But for four or five years our advisory committee has been discussing with us the possibility of opening the program to women. We also presented the idea to the board of provincials of the Christian Brothers. They have approved a pilot program to be started during the 1983 academic year. For two years, beginning in September 1983, we will be offering two of the four 100-day programs for men and women together; the other two sessions will remain as they are now, for men only. We don't know what the future be-

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yond that will hold, which is why we're referring to the change as a pilot program. Our board of provincials and advisory committee will be watching us closely to see how these less restricted sessions go. We expect the presence of sisters to enrich the experience for the priests and brothers and vice versa.

**HD:** How can further information about these sessions be obtained?

**Anglim:** By writing to the Brother Director, Sangre de Cristo Center, Route 4, Sante Fe, NM 87501, or by phoning (505) 983-7291.

**HD:** What's the cost of participation in a 100-day session here?

**Anglim:** It is usually significantly less than the cost of an academic experience of equivalent duration.

**HD:** Do you have a general impression of what the Sangre program does for your participants?

**Anglim:** Since each participant experiences Sangre as a "program within a program," that is a hard question to answer in a universal way. Most, however, would agree that Sangre has helped put them more in touch with the central movements and motives of their lives. The experience has made them

more compassionate with themselves and with others, more accepting of their real selves and their real lives. In the end, we hope it has made all members more aware of and more responsive to the God in their lives, and that is after all the only foundation that can be laid.

**HD:** And do you use the Sangre de Cristo Center's facilities for purposes other than the 100-day program?

**Anglim:** We use the intervals between sessions to offer short workshops on topics like prayer and leadership and to provide hospitality for meetings of groups from various religious congregations, such as formation and administrative teams, and for priests and religious who want to make a retreat in these beautiful surroundings. We are also willing to allow adult groups of lay persons to use our facilities for meetings, if the number of participants is relatively small and the atmosphere we provide is consonant with their aims.

**HD:** And what is the job of director of this thriving Center doing to or for you?

**Anglim:** It's been a growth experience without any doubt, because of the warmth of the team members I work with, of our advisory committee, and of our visiting staff, and certainly because of the relationships that are established with the people who come for the programs. Then, too, the supportive rhythm of what happens at Sangre during the programs is helpful to my own life and growth. There is, of course, the constant necessity to look to this growth so that the demands of the work do not make it just another job or overpower other values because of the time and energy the programs call from me. As a team, we help one another on this.

In a way the experience has proved, for me, idyllic. I have a rhythm of prayer available to me, a rhythm of Eucharist, and a rhythm of quiet solitude. I do enjoy a richness of personal associations here that just staggers my mind when I compare it with any other experience of community I've had in my life. I know these men for only a hundred days, but we get to be fairly close. I know them deeply and I'm concerned about them. I share their lives, their cares, their growth, their successes, and their failures. I find that parting from them is hard; I'm not used to that. But watching what is being accomplished by former Sangre participants all over the world and observing the growth that has taken place in their lives are extremely gratifying. I'm deeply grateful to God for bringing me here.

# RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

## That the World May Believe

GEORGE A. ASCHENBRENNER, S.J.

**C**ommunity is a word most of us are sick and tired of hearing, but it remains an experience our hearts long for. The profound social orientation of the human heart, though it can often be denied or impeded in various ways, nonetheless gives each of us a deep desire for the support of shared ideals and vision. The lonely life of a rugged individualist is finally, at a deep inner level, neither very satisfying nor so happily abundant as it could be.

I want to reflect here on the need and conditions for the development in religious life of a more extensive sense of corporate unity. I will comment on how this missionary unity, which ought to bind members as they serve all over the world, demands a certain governmental role model in the congregation and an apostolic humility, solitude, and contemplation on the part of each member. In closing I will present two reasons why we cannot let our ef-

forts lag in developing such a true and profound sense of community.

### A CHARISM EXPERIENCED AND SHARED

Let me be clear and quite precise about our topic. Christian community is always a union of minds and hearts focused primarily on the vision of a shared faith experience. This rules out any other unifying aspect as the chief focal point. A group of people—well educated, around the same age, with a similar concern for service of the poor, and living together—is not necessarily a Christian community. There must be an explicitly acknowledged

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faith vision, religiously experienced by all members, that motivates and binds at the deepest level.

In religious life, this unifying faith vision is the charism and spirit arising from the founding experience of the particular congregation. Renewal since Vatican II has taught us a lot about how the founding experience of a congregation can be a live, developing spirit, a faith event focusing the group's unity. Many congregations have had to acknowledge some fairly serious deficiencies in this experienced unity. The founding charism cannot simply be talked about, even enthusiastically; it must be experienced. Once this experience has been reflectively appreciated, the charism can and, to some extent, must be articulated in a recognizable form for all the members. This articulation, when it is the result of a prayerful, widely representative process, can inspire the members to a deeper experience of the identifying spirit and charism.

In contrast to the realization that a narrowly monolithic understanding of the vision of a particular congregation is not life-giving, we have also learned that too broad a pluralism of opinions and understandings of the basic identity of a group always disrupts its genuine unity. If certain fundamentals are not agreed on, strains and ruptures are felt within the group, even when these tensions are hidden beneath a veneer of civility and kindness. For example, the practice of the compromising "third way" by some members of a celibate community simply has to impede mobilization of the group for apostolic service through their shared affectivity in faith. In another example, some members of actively apostolic congregations who were given too monastic a formation for many years can find it very difficult to develop an apostolic availability that is clearly part of the original founding experience and that should be giving apostolic vitality to the group's service today.

The last fifteen years have taught us that we cannot presume as a foregone conclusion that all members are actually experiencing the charism in more than a superficial way. Nor can we presume, therefore, the existence of a profound unity resulting from the shared experience in faith of the founding charism. We have had to acknowledge deficiencies in our experienced unity. Although this is always a painful admission in a community, it need not be the knell of doom. Often it can expose a renewed desire for community and the determination to work for it.

## NEW EXPERIENCE SOUGHT

There is evidence in this country of a growing desire for renewed religious community and a movement toward a new understanding and experience of reality. The deep bond of unity and support, far beyond local and geographical presence, that springs from the shared experience throughout a whole community of "being sent" on apostolic

mission is much more appreciated and gradually becoming more of an experienced reality. Many congregations have developed governmental structures and channels of communication that expedite the incarnation of an individual's own serious apostolic discernment within the community's or the province's overall apostolic vision and plan. Finally, the individual is missioned by a decision of religious authority.

All of this calls forth in each person the deep attitude of heart of "being sent." This attitude can fashion a bond of unity throughout the whole congregation of sharing the mission of Jesus received from his Father and restore an experience of community more universal than its embodiment in a local, live-in group. The tangible support and union of this shared attitude of heart is eloquently expressed in a letter of Francis Xavier. He is writing to Ignatius Loyola, his dear friend, who had missioned him far away to India, and to his beloved companions in the newly established Company of Jesus—men he would probably never see again on this earth.

God Our Lord knows how much more my soul would be comforted by a sight of you than by writing these letters, that are so uncertain owing to the great distance from here to Rome. But since it is God Our Lord who has separated us in such far-apart places and we are so united in one love and spirit, the bodily severance cannot, I am sure, cause any lessening of love or care in those who love one another in the Lord. For, as I fancy, we see one another almost always, even if we do not have our old familiar conversations. The memory of the past when established in Christ supplies, as it were, an intuitive knowledge. That so constant thought of you all which is in my soul is more your creation than mine, since it is your continual devoted prayers and acceptable sacrifices for me, a poor sinner, which imprints on my soul, my only and most dear brothers in Christ, your undying memory.

These words clearly express a busy, zealous heart's experience of a unity so intense that the other members, half a globe away, are concretely, almost tangibly, present as strength and support. The passage also includes certain conditions requisite for the creation of such an encouraging unity and strength.

## AUTHORITY ROLE MODELING

To allow religious authority in a community to be a servant of unity for mission presumes two things: a special understanding of authority role models and the readiness of apostolic humility, solitude, and contemplation in the heart of each member. First, there has been much development

of the role model of authority in religious community. Twenty or more years ago, the all-powerful superior seemed to have total control of every second of our time and every ounce of our being. Superiors almost seemed to have more power than God. At times they seemed to exercise this power in a despotic and unilateral fashion. Very little dialogue took place.

Ordinarily superiors were not personally at fault. They simply acted out an accepted role model, which was surrounded with all sorts of expectations and justifying rationalizations. They were the ultimate disciplinarians; and to be called to account by them was cause for fear and trembling. They were also responsible for making the little decisions for the community's daily style and schedule. They dispensed all permissions. We rarely had anything more than superficial, impersonal dealings with them. As a result, fear and trembling often characterized our whole relationship with them. Further, on becoming a superior, many people seemed almost to go through a personality change. We hardly recognized them anymore. They got lost in the dark center of that role, heavily overlaid with a past understanding and style. Often, all alone in that dark center, the superior was very lonely.

A despotic style can never last forever. The free human spirit will rebel. So it did in the early stages of renewal in the 60s and 70s. It was very understandable that a number of antiauthoritarian reactions occurred in various communities. Thank God for wise superiors who appreciated the overreaction for what it was and did not fight it every inch of the way. From it being unheard of not to have a superior in *every* community we came to question why *any* community needed a superior and whether the presence of a superior was not an interference with the personal responsibility of each member. How the pendulum swung! Indeed, the swing was so abrupt that many slipped away. Today much of the energy of these strong reactions has been spent, and many communities are struggling to regroup around a unity for mission. There are not as many communities now in which an apparently excessive freedom operates in a ruggedly individualistic fashion, without much leadership, without much cohesion, and without much support in a shared vision and presence—communities where any real corporate vision, mission, and life seems more a convenience than an essential.

Instead, a different role model is being rediscovered. The superior is seen as a spiritual leader whose authority and presence within the group focuses and calls forth the unity of vision and energy for mission. It is a presence that invites trust and respect from the other members and exercises authority as a result of dialogue and consultation—all prayerfully blessed by the guidance and light of the Holy Spirit. Not everyone has gifts for this special

kind of presence within a community. Thus, we are being much more careful to choose superiors according to this different role model. In fact, one of the more difficult tasks of a provincial superior is to find enough people gifted and ready for this special role of service within the community.

## HUMILITY TO BE SENT

Let us turn now to a part of the second element required if religious authority is to be a servant for the apostolic unity of a community: the apostolic humility of heart of each member. As long as the pervasive heresy of self-hatred and lack of healthy self-love and self-acceptance is strong in the church, a realistic humility remains quite difficult. When my emotions have convinced me that I am not likable, I cannot be peacefully at home with myself. What is worse is that the need for self-affirmation leading to self-esteem can dominate most of my psychic energy, often quite unconsciously. To be affirmed and esteemed becomes a major aim of my daily life, a bleeding wound sapping much of my healthy energy. In such a state of need this self-centered focus predominates, and my posture is unhealthily bent to favor the strained deficiency.

True humility is somehow always founded on a healthy sense of self. The person who is overly needy for self-affirmation finds it very difficult, if not at times impossible, to be alone with the self. It is always hard to be alone with a "someone" I do not like. The humble person has enough self-acceptance and self-esteem that there is no need to prove himself or herself in every experience of life. A person who is enough at home with the self can find in those moments of solitude a profoundly rich experience of a Father loving and affirming us all in the beauty of a Resurrected intimacy that blesses a Son's faithful, obedient dying. That Calvary act of love for each of us will never be surpassed. It is an act of affirmation and love, not oblivious of—but far beyond—any limited human expression.

But our growth toward this humility is usually a subtle and mixed experience. By dealing properly with the mixture of impulses and affections in the flow of our daily consciousness, we can grow in humility. The petty envies and jealousies of our hearts cannot always be avoided; they are healthy and expected signs of our fallen condition. Often these emotions, stemming from ambitions and competitive drives, scratch and claw divisions and scars in our community life. Some members may not have spoken to one another for a long time. Or they may have given up a long time ago on achieving any significant communication. These "unhumble" drives and tendencies, when not properly monitored and understood, will always violate community. What is called for is the decisive insight in faith to recognize these inner "spirits" for what they are and to make use of them in such a

# **Not to meet another in the depths of my own solitude in God trivializes all other daily encounters**

way that one's identity through the affirmation of God's love is renewed. Thus, in humility one is able to love others and genuinely rejoice in their accomplishments beyond any comparison and competition.

## **SOLITUDE, CONTEMPLATION, AND COMMUNITY**

Now I will look at the remaining part of the second condition for a deep, pervasive apostolic unity in a religious congregation. In *Clowning in Rome*, Henri Nouwen powerfully expresses the need for solitude and contemplation in the formation both of a humble identity and of community. People who are too busy to enter regularly into the solitude of contemplation gradually have less and less to offer in community and lose touch with the richest experience of community. Not to meet another in the depths of my own solitude in God trivializes all other daily encounters. As Nouwen says:

In solitude we come to know our fellow human beings not as partners who can satisfy our deepest needs, but as brothers and sisters with whom we are called to give visibility to God's all-embracing love. In solitude we discover that community is not a common ideology, but a response to a common call. . . . Solitude, then, is not private time in contrast to time together, nor a time to restore our tired minds. Solitude is very different from a time-out from community life. Solitude is the ground from which community grows. When we pray alone, study, read, write, or simply

spend quiet time away from the places where we interact with each other directly, we enter into a deeper intimacy with each other. It is a fallacy to think that we grow closer to each other only when we talk, play, or work together. Much growth certainly occurs in such human interactions, but these interactions derive their fruit from solitude, because in solitude our intimacy with each other is deepened. In solitude we discover each other in a way that physical presence makes difficult if not impossible. There we recognize a bond with each other that does not depend on words, gestures, or actions, a bond much deeper than our own efforts can create.

Without this sense of God's love for me and the union of all of us in his love, known in the deeper inner solitude of my heart, the attitude of "being sent" cannot be maintained. Without solitude and contemplation, self-centered, competitive drives would corrode any readiness to be sent, and one's heart would tend ambitiously to manipulate a sending of oneself. Only the quiet intimacy of a Father's tender love, relished alone in the deepest caverns of the heart, can maintain that zealous abandonment of self that allows one always to live as a gift sent by him. Jesus' own habit of solitude made him constantly capable of being sent on that mission of his dear Father, so beautifully and dramatically climaxed by his anguished abandonment in an olive grove and the final, wonderful surprise of Resurrection.

In the face of a rampant secularizing trend, this contemplative experience in solitude of our deep bondedness becomes especially important. It is very easy for weak human beings, immersed in an insidiously secular world, to be embarrassed and ashamed about their faith and thus not to share and live it as publicly as they could. But it can be even more frightening to watch a community's faith corrode as its members' life-style, conversation, and hearts gradually secularize and become less and less explicitly religious. The process of secularization is inevitable in human experience and can always be a stimulus for valuable religious development, but it will also always be very dangerous if not prayerfully discerned and chosen according to a reflectively shared religious identity. For each person to meet regularly in deep inner solitude the same loving God who waits for all the other members in the incommunicable solitude of their own hearts is an essential means to the appropriate sharing of the explicitly religious identity of the community.

One Scripture passage that can provide much insight into community if we pray over it often is the Letter to the Philippians (2:1–11). We are very familiar with the second part of this passage, verses 5 through 11. But we rarely put the whole passage together and thus see this well-known second sec-

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# **Failure to believe in religious community is somehow not to believe in a Father and Son united in a Spirit of intimate Love**

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tion as the sacred, mystical asceticism that makes possible the beautiful description of Christian community in the first four verses. Only a Christ-like emptying of self can produce genuine humility and thorough obedience to a loving Father in every circumstance and turn of event in this world. If we let this attitude of heart that was in Christ Jesus be our own, then we are joined together beyond any selfish, ambitious concern. Only by growing and persevering in this faith attitude and vision is union of minds and hearts possible. We can never ponder enough the challenge and invitation that the Spirit in this passage extends to all of us.

## **WORLD SEEKING WITNESS**

In conclusion, two important reasons urge against complacently slackening our efforts at community. In our contemporary, global-village

world, vastly improved means of communication give a rapidity of news reports that can provoke a deceptive sense of closer unity among people, whereas the world is actually filled with evidence of how difficult it is for people to live with and love one another. So many people wonder whether union and love in the great variety of the human family is possible, unless it is fabricated on a small scale according to basic similarities. I suggest that one of the most critical witnesses the world looks for from religious life today is evidence of people who do not hide in enclaves of natural similarity but who can find in our many differences a graced unity of love focused in a shared vision. See how they love one another! Are we up to this challenge that confronts us? That is a question we must all ponder, both individually and communally. But let us never forget what is finally at issue in our forming real community or not: the world's coming to believe, as in Jesus' words, "that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, live in me and I live in you, I am asking that they may live in us, that the world may believe that you did send me." (John 17:21)

Second, there is a reason for working at community that transcends any contemporaneity and is rooted in the very identity of God who is community. The true God revealed in Jesus is neither just One nor Three, yet in such a selfless love of sharing among Three distinct Persons is a unity so simple and profound as to defy full human comprehension. Failure to believe in and to work ceaselessly for religious community is somehow not to believe in the Christian God—a Father and Risen Son united in a Spirit of intimate Love, attractively available to all of us.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

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# PRIESTS FIND FORGIVENESS HARD TO ACCEPT

AEDAN MANNING, S.T.

If there is any validity to my belief that the problem with a priest accepting forgiveness lies in his self-image, it would seem important initially to try to describe what a self-image is and how it is shaped.

There are many definitions or descriptions of a self-image. One that I have found most helpful is provided by Robert Goldenson, in *The Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*: "a pattern of attitudes he entertains or assumes concerning his values, goals, abilities, and personal worth." The text that contains this particular definition continues: "An individual's self-image, or self-concept, is considered one of the most basic and crucial components of his personality. It deeply affects not only his relationship to himself, but his relations to other people and the world at large."

As we might expect, a self-image is not something that is one day put into a person's head or heart already programmed to carry him or her through life. It is something that is formed and grows within us from our personal interaction with the world around us. It is conditioned and shaped both by ourselves and others.

## SELF-IMAGE OF A PRIEST

No one is born a priest, even if Aunt Emma can claim at an ordination that she just knew her nephew would be a priest from the first moment

she saw him in the bassinet. However that complex and mysterious function of vocational choice works, a man/boy announces one day that he wishes to be a priest. At that moment he has some vague idea of what it means; he may even possess some concrete facts about the life he wishes to embrace. But at that point begins the interaction with the world around him. What has God said about a priest? What has the church said? What does the community think? What does the family expect? Do those outside the church view a priest favorably or not?

Over centuries an image of "priest" has been developed by the outside world. It is up to the individual candidate gradually to grapple with that image until he finally forms within himself the self-concept of *I, a priest*. But it is possible, especially today, to experience some changes in this priestly image. Such changes can be radical enough to introduce a crisis in one's self-image. Joseph Blomjous has observed, in *Priesthood and Crisis*: "The crisis in the image of the priesthood is really nothing more nor less than a sudden awareness both among priests themselves and among the people of the maladjustment of the traditional assumptions regarding the priesthood."

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# **"Every priest is chosen from his fellow men and appointed to serve God on their behalf"**

One drawback in confronting an assertion that one's self-image is the greatest obstacle in the reception of forgiveness is that in the formation of self-image, the self is very important. How do we study self? About all we can present for consideration is the image of priest as understood and articulated by the world around the aspirant or already ordained person. Obviously, each person with his natural gifts and graced relationships will shape this image differently.

## **PRIEST IMAGE FROM LITERATURE**

We can cull certain aspects of the image of the priest from various writings that are part of our culture. These give us a fairly vivid picture. But before demonstrating this, I would like to present an image of the priest from a negative point of view. By this I mean an image that develops from what is not said.

In considering a priest in his ongoing life, both in preparation for his tasks and in leading his sacerdotal life, we presume that he is establishing a faith relationship with God. In fact, as Scripture says, "Every priest is chosen from his fellow men and appointed to serve God on their behalf." (Hebrews 5:1) We know that most priests take this aspect of their life seriously. But no matter how hard they try, their humanness will at times lead them into sin. They will choose against the very God with whom they are striving to form this deep relationship. Not too shockingly then, we can make this less than bold statement: priests are sinners.

Go through any literature on the priesthood, whether before or since Vatican II, and try to dis-

cover either a book or a part of a book dedicated to the concept of the priest as sinner. You will find priest as preacher, priest as counselor, priest as confessor, priest as president of the liturgy, and so on, but not priest as sinner. In the Vatican II *Decree on Priestly Formation* and *Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests*, the word sin itself appears only two or three times. In each case it is mentioned in connection with the priest exercising his ministry of healing over the sins of others.

Perhaps we have to go back to the question asked in the title of Karl Menninger's book, *Whatever Happened to Sin?* and with honesty face up to sin in the life of the priest and not use euphemisms. Perhaps the following sentences from the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests* will illustrate what I mean: "Finally, by reason of the same communion in the priesthood, priests should realize that they have special obligations toward priests who labor under certain difficulties. They should give them timely help and also, if necessary, admonish them prudently. Moreover, they should always treat with fraternal charity and magnanimity those who have failed in some way, offering urgent prayers to God for them and continually showing themselves to be true brothers and friends."

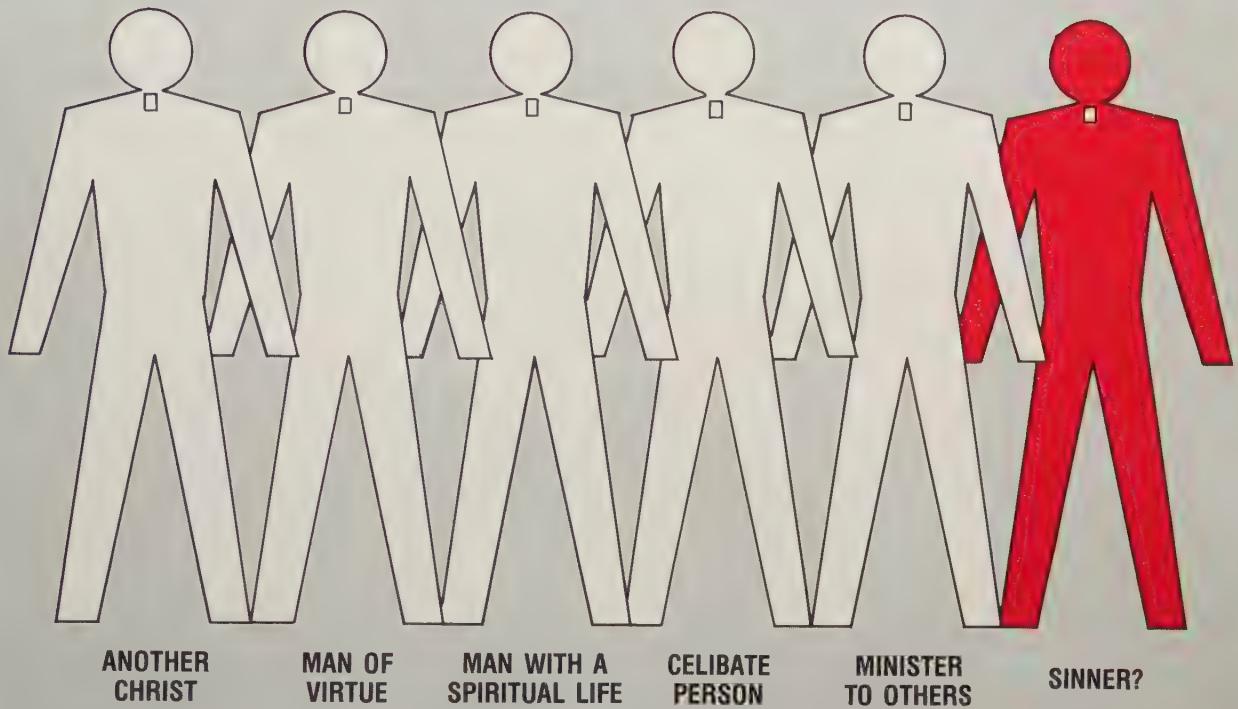
The statement is really quite beautiful and warmly touching considering the usual tenor of church documents. However, it skirts around the word sin. It is as applicable to a person who has failed a test or botched an administrative post as it is to one who has deliberately and perhaps seriously rejected God as his friend.

Chapters on the spiritual life of the priest—whether in an old classic like *Priesthood*, by H. S. Box, or in a more modern reflection like *The Uncertain Trumpet*, by Andrew Greeley—leave us with the idea that priestly spirituality is only the positive acquisition of the virtues of prayer, celibacy, obedience, and knowledge. They recognize temptation and weakness, which the acquisition of these virtues will either thwart or strengthen the person against, but say not a word about the priest who yields to the temptation or succumbs to the weakness. There is little or no indication that an element of one's advance in spirituality is conversion from sin. You get the impression that only priests in novels are sinners, as we find in the classics by Graham Greene and Morris West. Perhaps the reason for their popularity is that they have the ring of authenticity about them.

## **STRESS BUT NOT SIN**

In reading through some of the priest-related literature of today, we find words like stress-filled, hurting, burnt-out, insecure, erratic, and unmotivated, to name a few, but I have been hard put to find any reference to sinful. And what I do not find in the literature about the priest of today or yesterday, I find in my pastoral practice in the confes-

## IMAGE OF THE PRIEST



ANOTHER  
CHRIST

MAN OF  
VIRTUE

MAN WITH A  
SPIRITUAL LIFE

CELIBATE  
PERSON

MINISTER  
TO OTHERS

SINNER?

sional: ordained men ashamed because they have sinned.

I mention this lacuna because it can have its impact on someone who is fashioning his self-image. If sin is never mentioned in connection with a priest, he has to begin to figure that the various agencies of the world that surround him do not expect or accept sin in his life. This society may tolerate or accept lovingly a variety of other faults and failings. The priest can be sick, psychologically strung out, or a professional bungler and still expect the help and support of the community. But, no sin, please. It does not fit the self-image a priest is encouraged to develop.

I would like to move on now to some of the positive virtues in the priestly vocation that have definite influence in forming a priest's self-image. As one might suspect, there are many. Each age and culture has added its own expectations. Among the many qualities I have found, the following seem to occur most frequently: (1) the priest as the *Alter*

*Christus*, (2) the priest as a man of virtue with a spiritual life, (3) the priest as celibate, and (4) the priest as minister to others. I intend to reflect briefly on each of these concepts to see how they affect the priest's self-image, his sinfulness, and finally his ability to accept forgiveness.

### PRIEST AN ALTER CHRISTUS

For a long time in Catholic theology—and also in other Christian sects that have carried on the tradition of a ministerial priesthood—the connection of the priest's role with Christ has been captured in the expression *Alter Christus*, another Christ. It was always understood that the priest was not truly a carbon copy of Christ, the God-man; however, insofar as his duties were to mediate between God and humanity, he was much like Christ, the Anointed One. Priests are really, as Box called them, the *medii inter Deum et populum*, the intermediaries between God and the people.

## **Carrying the image of an *Alter Christus*, while aware of his sinfulness, can make a priest feel like a betrayer of God's trust**

In the exercise of his priesthood the priest is to offer the words of life to all. The *Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests* stated: "Hence they deal with other men as brothers. This was the way that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, a man sent by the Father to men, dwelt among us and willed to become like his brother in all things except sin." Within the community it is the task of the priest to be a servant, as Christ was a servant. The Maundy Thursday celebration of service is at the same time the celebration of the establishment of the priesthood.

The priest is to be the good shepherd who goes out and carries back the errant and wounded sheep. He brings solace and forgiveness to the sinners in his community. So the Christ-like tasks of the priest go on. Probably one of the simpler synopses of this scenario is contained in a brief article in *Chicago Studies*, by Thomas J. Grady. He makes a comparison of the roles of the priest with the models of the church presented by theologian Avery Dulles. In one of the concluding paragraphs, Grady says: "The Lord Jesus Christ came to our earth. He planted seeds of trust which in time transformed large segments of our society, which have Christianized, humanized our society. . . . But most of all, He gave us His love. . . . As priests, I think that we have to be builders of a new world, but first we must be lovers." Grady too identifies priests with Christ.

In many ways this is an exhilarating idea—it is also humbling. But more important, for our consideration, it can be paralyzing. Christ came among us and did all these wonderful things. So can the

priest. Christ became man and dwelt among us. So are priests men. "He was like us in all things except sin." (Hebrews 4:15) And here the priest cannot identify. Carrying the image of being another Christ, while at the same time being aware of his sinfulness, can make a priest feel like a betrayer of God's trust. It is one thing for the innocent Christ to ask his Father to "forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) It is quite another to imagine Christ saying, "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned." It is an impossible thought. Therefore, for those in the ministerial priesthood who have and, to some extent, still bear the title *Alter Christus*, their sins and hope for forgiveness can be tortuous events.

### **MAN OF VIRTUE WITH A SPIRITUAL LIFE**

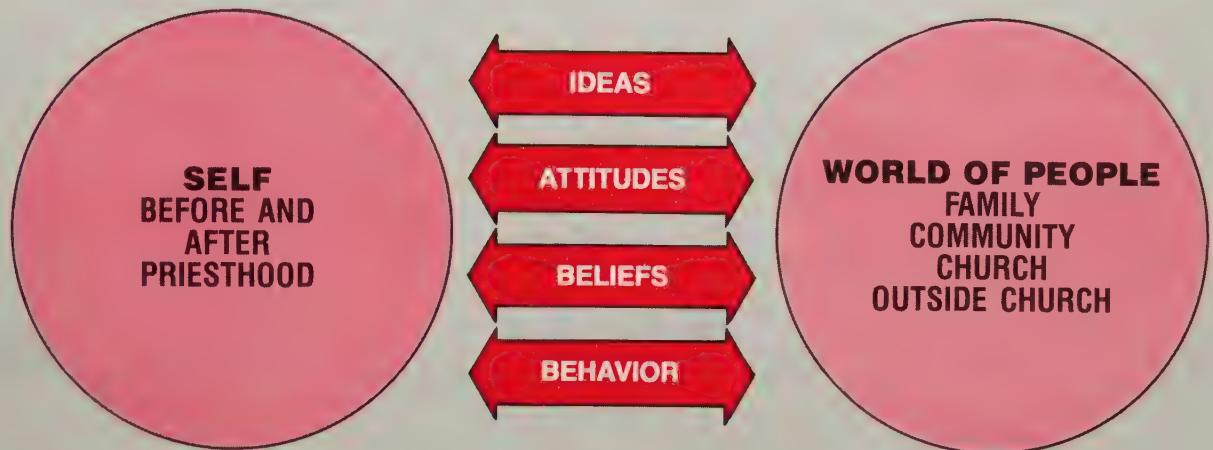
A prime consideration of the priest's life is the cultivation of a spiritual life. I would suggest that two of the main ingredients of this life are: (1) a viable prayer life and (2) the cultivation of those virtues that will aid in his ministerial work. It follows the old adage: *Nemo dat quod non habet*.

In Box's work on the priesthood, he begins the chapter on the interior life of the priest with the quotation: *Si cor non orat, in vanum lingua laborat* ("If the heart is not praying, the tongue works in vain"). Since the Vatican II *Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests* says that his primary duty is the proclamation of the gospel, without doing too much damage to the literal intent of Box's words, we can deduce that for the priest to proclaim well he must pray well.

His prayer life must be one that is based on the Scripture so that he can identify with the person of Christ. It is only in this way that he can speak the saving message. Even as the priest rises through each of the various levels of prayer, he must not divorce this process from his proclamatory vocation. Not even involvement in contemplative prayer removes him from that necessity or from incorporating these prayer forms into his personality, his self-image, and his role within the church.

A careful reading of the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of the Priests* reminds us more of a call to the spiritual life than a treatise on ministry. Perhaps they are as totally identifiable as the *Document on the Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood* seems to indicate. There is in both of these documents the call to prayer and the call to cultivate the virtues of obedience, humility, charity, and celibacy. In short, it is a call to the life of perfection. The *Decree on the Ministry* states: "To the acquisition of this perfection priests are bound by a special claim, since they have been consecrated to God in a new way by the reception of orders. They have become living instruments of Christ the eternal priest, so that through the ages they can accomplish his wonderful work of reuniting the whole society of men with heavenly power."

## DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-IMAGE OF PRIEST



## INTERACTION

In relation to the priest who is considered an *Alter Christus*, such a statement, as said earlier, can be exhilarating, humbling, but also paralyzing. When we start applying to the priest the idea of perfection on a scale with the heavenly Father, it becomes overwhelming. When the decree just quoted adds to that concept the purpose of reuniting the whole society, we are dealing with a work ethic of outstanding proportions. Who can seriously live up to that, even given the best of good will and an extraordinary amount of holiness? How can sin fit comfortably into a self-image that is grappling to embrace the concept of being perfect, prayerful, and virtuous? I think a man of perfection would have a very difficult time bowing his head and saying, "Be merciful to me a sinner."

### PRIEST AS A CELIBATE PERSON

I suppose that every priest would like to consider that his primary virtue is charity. If, in fact, he is going to be a faithful follower of Jesus, then charity

as outlined in St. John's fifteenth chapter should be his specialty. Indeed, much of the writing on the priesthood recommends that virtue to him if he is going to be a true minister to his brothers and sisters. In order to mediate the love conveyed by the sacraments, a full measure of this virtue is needed. Without it we priests have the feeling of duty done in a perfunctory fashion. We experience a certain hollowness in what should be moving moments of grace.

One of the priestly virtues that has been recommended as a motivator toward and a guarantor of universal charity is that of celibacy. I find this just a little ironic these days, because probably nothing else connected with priestly life has caused more consternation, division, and loss of charity among various members of the church.

To reiterate, of all the virtues, a priest would like to be known by his charity. In truth, however, the predominant virtue identified with priests in the minds of most Catholics and non-Catholics is celibacy, or chastity. It usually demands the most space in

# We must make it possible for the priest, too, to receive with joy the words: "Nor do I condemn you either, go now and sin no more"

the literature on the priesthood. It is of overriding concern in the formation of seminarians. Everyone is concerned about personal psychosexual development. But if the world in general is preoccupied with sex, those who deal in the formation and screening of future priests could put the rest to shame. The sad thing about this preoccupation with celibacy as the badge of the Catholic priesthood is that it has remained, at least on the official level, a virtue removed from reality.

## SEXUAL ISSUE UNAVOIDABLE

Sexuality is a large part of anyone's personal life. It is a basic part of self-definition. We interact sexually in almost every aspect of our lives. Yet celibacy does not actually shut off this sexual identity. It does not end self-fulfillment any more than marriage guarantees it, that is, when we look at celibacy realistically. The problem I see with some discussions of celibacy is that the end product is almost a disembodied spirit. For example, we read in the *Decree on Priestly Formation*: "Let them perceive as well the superiority of virginity consecrated to Christ, so that by a choice which is maturely thought out and magnanimous they may attach themselves to God by a total gift of body and soul." Furthermore, as the *Decree on the Ministry* adds: "They thereby evoke that mysterious marriage which was established by God and will be fully manifested in the future, and by which the church has Christ as her only spouse. Moreover, they become a vivid sign of that future world which is already present through faith and charity, and in which the children of the resurrection will neither marry nor take wives."

Surely the church teachers do not in any way wish to reintroduce Manichaeism. But running throughout the documents is this flavor of the evil of the flesh. Even some of the more modern writings, in an attempt to give positive spiritual reasons for professing vows and promises of chastity and celibacy, move into the realm of extraterrestrial disembodiment.

Along with these considerations, we have the church's official teachings on sexual morality, which have been, until recently, most discouraging. Even now there has been little attempt officially to incorporate any of the insights from the empirical sciences. Each deliberate sexual sin is seen as *ex toto genere suo mortale*. Moreover, the findings in the survey reported in 1972 by the U.S. bishops on the priesthood in America are not very encouraging today. Whereas at that time many of the younger priests did not take such a harsh stand on such sexual sins as masturbation, premarital sex, and fornication, many of that same age group are no longer priests and hence have little influence in the church today.

Until very recently the admission of difficulty with sexual matters in the seminary was tantamount to an invitation to leave. It was a sure sign that a person had no vocation. There was little or no sense of a candidate maturing in his ability to live a celibate life. As a result, many seminarians chose to live with the guilt of sexual sin in order to avoid being asked to leave and carried that burden and habit of sin with them into the priesthood. Consequently, this did not help them develop a very healthy self-image.

Currently within the priesthood we are encountering some rather conservative and fundamentalistic middle-aged and younger clergy. For them, the flesh and sexual sins are the devil's handiwork. They find joy and fulfillment not in the fleshly working together of brothers and sisters to make the world a better place but rather in singing the songs and praises of the Lord.

Whether the priest views celibacy as the indicator of his true identification with Christ or as the means of entering into a pure marriage with the Lord or as the helper and guarantor of charity or as a means of opposing the assaults of the devil, it leaves little room for the priest who sins sexually. The virginal purity of the priesthood becomes defiled. The worst occurs if his sin happens to be one of those set down as unnatural. All sorts of vile images take over, none of which can contribute to a healthy self-image. How does a minister of the chaste bride of Christ approach his God and ask for forgiveness?

## PRIEST AS MINISTER TO OTHERS

In the older theology that predated Vatican II, seminarians were reminded in the treatment of the sacrament of orders that it was a social sacrament.

That is, all of their powers were meant for others, not themselves. Today we have translated that concept into the word *diakonia*. The priests that I have encountered in my life, by and large, have always felt that this ideal was a compelling element in their choice of vocation. Perhaps various ages and eras made the specifics of how that service was realized different so that at one time the emphasis was sacramental and at another time social. But service to others was always the driving force behind most of what a priest did and does.

In the *Document on the Spiritualization of the American Priesthood*, this service is identified as playing a vital part in helping the priest become a holy person. I think the genius of this document is in its appreciation of that very fact. The service that the priest does for others is not something tangential to his priesthood, nor does this activity take him away from his obligation to become a holy person. The document seems to have put aside that nagging dichotomy that existed for so long between the monkish and the service components of the sacerdotal vocation.

A priest should derive a great deal of joy from his ministry to others. His attendance at all of the most important moments of others' lives from birth to death and in between afford opportunities to heal, to nourish with word and sacrament, to witness consecrated love. These should bring much consolation, especially into the life of a celibate. Indeed, these are his life-giving moments.

Unfortunately, for some older priests this was not always the case. In the back of their heads were the long instructions about the worthiness of the minister. For a time, there was even some theological question about whether the worthiness (read *sinfulness*) of the priest affected the validity of his sacramental ministrations. In reading some of the past instructions on how to say mass, one is struck by the excessive legalism brought to this holy event and by how a priest was able to sin so many times in performing this rite. One moral theologian actually counted up and listed the opportunities for sin a priest saying mass had, and the number of possible sins reached into the hundreds.

What I am trying to emphasize is that, in his ministry to others, the concern about his own sinfulness can weigh on the conscience of the priest-

celebrant and cause great anxiety for his self-image. It might also explain why so many priests in the past were such sticklers for the minutiae of the rubrics.

As mentioned earlier, in the church today a rather fundamentalistic trend among a portion of the clergy, especially a new-found concern about a person's prayer life, is beginning to show some signs of a return to the mentality of the spirituality of the book *Soul of the Apostolate* (Jean-Baptiste Chautard, circa 1946). There is a fear of lessening one's goodness the more one works among people in the world. The individual priest remains somewhat torn in his efforts to be a faithful servant, a prayerful person, and a worthy minister. As he attempts to balance these diverse aims, he often finds it difficult to present himself before the merciful Lord. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard priests confess as sinful their not having finished certain prayers because they were ministering to their people. It is easy to say that that sounds like immaturity, but when one is working out of a self-image of heightened idealism, super-human seems to be the ordinary demand.

There is no doubt in my mind that there are priests who neglect their prayer life and stay busy guiltlessly. Neither do I doubt that many priests have attained a comfortable self-image and maturely and happily live their lives in Jesus Christ. I am concerned about the significant number who have not. I think we, as a church, must address ourselves to them and their problem. I do not think it helps to pretend there is no sin in the priesthood. Nor does it help to say, "Of course priests sin; aren't they human just like everyone else?" That is too facile.

Because a priest's vocation and self-image are built on very high ideals, he must as a consequence approach the forgiving God with this uniqueness. Often he finds the gap between the idealism of his image and the realism of his sin too forbidding to let him feel entitled to forgiveness. He forgets his words of consolation to others. We—as a community that interacts with our brother priest and helps him form his self-image—must make possible for him, too, the opportunity to receive with joy the words: "Nor do I condemn you either, go now and sin no more." (John 8:11)

# PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

MICHAEL E. CAVANAGH, Ph.D.

**T**he two basic issues at hand are: (1) what a religious congregation or diocese can do when a sister, brother, or priest seems to be experiencing inordinate psychosocial problems and (2) how the congregation, the person in psychotherapy, and the therapist can better understand and help each other.

The format I have chosen rests on ten questions most frequently asked when psychotherapeutic issues in religious life are discussed. Before delving into these questions, it is necessary to keep in mind that the issues involved are often complex and sensitive; hence, universally valid answers cannot be formulated. Although general attitudes and guidelines can be developed, each person and situation must be approached individually.

1. How do we know when a member of our community needs help?

One need not be a mental health professional to recognize problematic behavior. If a person's be-

havior appears to be personally, interpersonally, or professionally damaging to any significant and continuing degree, it is likely that the person needs some kind of help. It is usually a sign when members of a community finally feel: "This behavior can't go on any longer." Unfortunately, however, there are times when a person could be experiencing serious problems that are not reflected in everyday behavior. In these cases, the community would have no idea that the person needed help.

2. How can we convey to a person that he or she needs help, and how do we know what kind of help is needed?

The concerns of the community should be conveyed by those whom the person likes and trusts.

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They may be a friend and/or people who live in the same house. Ordinarily, it is more helpful if several members of the household or staff participate in this discussion. The reasons for this are threefold: (1) the responsibility does not rest on one individual, (2) the feedback from a few or several people is likely to have more effect than the "personal opinions" of one person, (3) the feedback will come from people who have experienced the problematic behavior firsthand. Obviously, if more than one person conveys this information, everything possible should be done to avoid the perception that they are "ganging up" on the individual.

## AUTHORITY CAN IMPEDE

Generally, the least helpful person to convey the community's concerns is someone in high authority. These individuals are frequently at a marked disadvantage because they may lack a current personal relationship with the person, or the information they have about the person is hearsay, or their being authority figures may add stress to an already stressful situation. Moreover, having someone in authority convey the information does not take the "heat" off the local community; in fact, the opposite is true. The person knows that the information came from the local community, and this often causes more hurt, suspicion, and resentment than would have been experienced if the local community had addressed the situation directly.

When approaching a person with the concerns of the community, a two-step process is often helpful. The first is the *advisement* step, in which the person is told of the community's concern. The specific problematic behavior, as well as its damaging reverberations, should be clearly and honestly discussed. The person can also be asked how he or she thinks the community can help. Issues that may be discussed, depending on the problem, are a lightened work load, a transfer to another house, or a facilitated discussion with others whom the person perceives as part of the problem.

If the person appears open to a suggestion of professional help, it would be appropriate to mention this as one alternative. If the person does not seem ready for this step, it is best to keep the assistance on an informal basis, unless the problematic behavior is serious and highly disruptive. It is to be hoped that the person will admit to the presence of problematic behavior and will take advantage of the informal and/or formal help that is offered. However, the person is also likely to deny the presence of a problem or may admit to a problem but state that he or she will handle it privately. In any case, unless the behavior is of great concern, it is better to leave the issue at that point with the hope that the discussion itself will have a salutary effect.

If the problematic behavior continues and shows insignificant or no signs of change, the second step is necessary, that of *referral*. This means that the

community feels it has done everything reasonable to help the person and is now requesting that he or she seek professional help. This can be done in a compassionate yet firm manner, preferably by the same people who participated in the advisement step. The person may now agree with this assessment and seek some referral sources. However, since the person did not respond to the initial advisement well, he or she is likely to deny the problem again, or at least its magnitude, and resist a further suggestion to seek help.

At this point the community has the choice of letting the matter drop or insisting that the person seek help, using whatever levers are appropriate; for example, telling the person that until help is sought, he or she cannot continue an apostolate, live in the community, and so on. Those who are maneuvered into therapy may not be good candidates for it, but still, the therapy may eventually prove successful. If they can find a therapist whom they grow to like and trust and if the therapist can remain a free agent, in contrast to an agent of the community, the person can gradually move from resistance to cooperation.

3. Should there be a standard procedure that a person can follow when considering and beginning psychotherapy?

I do not think it is *necessary* to have a procedure, but it could be mutually beneficial. For example, a congregation, depending on its size, would select two, four, or six mental health resource personnel from its membership. More than one resource person is important because everyone may not be able to interact comfortably with the same person. These individuals would be people who are generally liked, trusted, and respected within the congregation. It is not necessary that they have a mental health background or a special knowledge of psychotherapy.

## THREE WAYS TO HELP

The resource personnel could be made use of in three ways. First, they would compile a list of three or more psychotherapists whom the congregation has found to be helpful. Many people seeking help do not know how to find a good psychotherapist who also has an understanding of religious life. Second, once the person has met with a selected psychotherapist a few times, he or she could then advise the resource personnel about the therapist's fees, the frequency of appointments, and the approximate duration of therapy. Third, the person in therapy periodically could advise the resource person about the progress of therapy or communicate concern about a lack of sufficient progress. The person in therapy need not share the nature of his or her problems, unless both people agree that it would be helpful.

This procedure is helpful to the congregation because it will point up that the person is doing some-

thing about his or her problem and can perhaps help the congregation to be more understanding of the changes taking place. On a practical level, the congregation should take into account how house or assignment changes will affect the person in therapy. The congregation should also be aware of the amount of money and time involved. The more informed the congregation is, the more potentially helpful and cooperative it can be to both the person in therapy and the therapist.

#### 4. How should we treat somebody who we know is in therapy?

In general, I prefer that the local community and whole congregation treat the person I am seeing in therapy in the same way that they would treat anyone else. People who ask this question are often fearful that they will do or say something that will damage either the person or the therapeutic process. It is extremely unlikely that this will occur. I am much more concerned about a community that treats the person with kid gloves, thus allowing him or her to behave in ways that are mutually unhelpful or unsatisfactory. As a therapist, I find it most helpful when the community treats the person with the same constructive honesty and support that it would afford to any other member. If the constructive honesty creates tensions for the individual, these can be brought out in therapy and used as instruments of growth.

If the person is so distraught or disturbed that he or she cannot function within the ordinary boundaries of community living and apostolic responsibility, then arrangements should be made that would be more helpful to both the person and the community. I do not feel that it is necessary, or an act of charity, for an entire community to suffer because one of its members is experiencing serious psychosocial difficulties.

5. What are some of the basic issues that are helpful to understanding the nature of the therapeutic process? The following issues, when understood, often reduce the anxieties of the congregation.

(1) Most therapy takes time, for several reasons. First, although the symptoms may have been noticeable to the person and/or others for a relatively short time, many people enter therapy with problems that have been simmering for years, sometimes for the better part of their lives. When this is the case, the person's symptoms may diminish relatively soon, but it will take significantly longer to ferret out the causes of distress. Analogously, it takes a much shorter time to extinguish a structural fire than it does to discover its cause in order to prevent future flare-ups.

Second, therapy is generally a complex process. Among other things, it includes: developing a relationship based on deep trust; unlearning maladaptive behaviors and learning adaptive ones in their place; and participating in the arduous process of learning to crawl, toddle, walk, and run

in at least one, if not several, critical areas of behavior.

Third, a natural part of personality growth is resistance. Although on the one hand we want to grow, on the other we resist growth because we fear it and do not want to experience the pain, take the risks, or expend the time and effort. Hence, tugs-of-war often exist in the therapeutic relationship, which, while natural, may well impede the rate of progress.

A fourth relevant issue is the emergence of latent problems as therapy progresses. Sometimes the reasons that cause someone to begin therapy do not reflect his or her deeper problems. For example, a priest may seek therapy because he is caught in a bind with his mother who is overly dependent on him. When he spends his day off with her, he resents it; when he does not, he feels guilty. It may take from five to fifteen sessions to resolve this dilemma; the priest should advise the congregation of his commitment. However, as the priest's defenses relax and he grows to trust the therapist, other, deeper concerns may arise. For example, questions about sexuality, faith, priesthood, or drinking may emerge that may need fifty or a hundred and fifty sessions to resolve successfully. If the priest does not keep his congregation posted on these changes (which can be done without divulging the specific nature of the problem), it may appear to the community that the priest is spending an inordinate amount of time in psychotherapy.

### TERMS SOMETIMES CONFUSING

It is helpful to keep in mind that the vocabulary we use often implies that people are in therapy for longer than they are. For example, when we say someone has been in therapy for two years, what we really mean is that the person has had about ninety hours of therapy, which is equivalent to spending two weekends with someone. This is not very long, especially when one considers the duration and nature of the problem.

(2) In therapy, "getting better" is a complex concept. It is not unusual for people to feel worse during the early stages of getting better and hence discouraged. They feel worse (more anxious, pessimistic) because their defenses are melting, and they see the problematic parts of themselves even more clearly than they did before entering therapy. They also realize that therapy is going to take more than the few sessions that they had hoped. However, awareness of these issues is necessary for personality growth to take place.

In addition, it is not unusual for people, especially in the beginning and middle stages of therapy, to appear to others as if they are getting worse. This seems so most likely because they are becoming more honest with themselves and others and feel freer to discontinue the pretense that things are better than they are. Individuals may also become

# **Is it ever appropriate for a congregation to question a seeming lack of progress in psychotherapy?**

more assertive and emancipate themselves from relationships and terminate jobs they feel to be unhelpful.

Another problem with the concept of getting better is the criteria used in judging growth. Take the priest who wants to resign as pastor to assume other priestly duties. For him this may be a psychologically healthy choice, but his fellow priests call it regression. Or we see the sister whose decision to take a leave of absence may be a good one, yet her superiors dispute the rightness of her choice. Although not typical, it is also not rare that the goals of psychological health do not always coincide with what the significant others in a person's life desire for him or her or for themselves in relation to that individual.

(3) Not everyone is a reasonable candidate for psychotherapy. As with surgery, people can range from being very good candidates to being very poor ones. Whether or not people will benefit depends on their strength of motivation to change, their level of psychological endurance, and the duration and nature of their problems. When people are willing to work hard to change, when they possess enough psychological strength to be able to use therapy, and when their problem is amenable to treatment, they are reasonably good candidates. On the other hand, when people want to feel better without getting better or want to feel badly, when their psychological strength is so depleted that they cannot communicate, think, feel, and work in ways that psychotherapy requires, or when psychotherapy has had little success in treating their problem,

they are not reasonable candidates for psychotherapy, at least on an outpatient basis.

## **REALISM ABOUT GOALS**

At times it may be appropriate for a therapist to agree to see an unlikely candidate for psychotherapy. When this occurs, those involved should be advised to gear their expectations to reality and not to the fantasy that once a person is receiving help, he or she is on the road to psychological health.

(4) The goals of therapy are relative, not absolute. There are three basic psychological states that a person can reach on the successful termination of therapy. First, he or she can be symptom free, e.g., no longer depressed, and have grown to a point of good psychological health. Second, the person can be symptom free but not have reached a point of good psychological health. Third, he or she may experience a symptom reduction, that is, symptoms may be a little less or a lot less than before therapy. This situation is not unique to psychotherapy. It is seen in every field in which people are helped, including medicine and spiritual direction. Hence, although it is difficult to rejoice in the fact that someone is "only" 10%, 30%, or 70% symptom free as a result of a year or three years of therapy, nevertheless, it could indicate that treatment was as successful as it could have been, given the individual and the nature of his or her problems. Moreover, for anyone who has had excruciating psychological symptoms, 10% or 30% relief is nothing to disparage.

6. Is it ever appropriate for a congregation to question a seeming lack of progress in psychotherapy?

This issue arises when a person in therapy either does not appear to be progressing to a degree appropriate to the time in therapy or else is behaving in increasingly problematic ways. I think it is appropriate for a congregation to confront this issue because the community has a genuine concern for the person and because the person's problematic behavior may be impairing the well-being of other members.

Yet I do not think it is appropriate to contact the therapist without first sharing the concern with the person in therapy. This discussion may be sufficient to reduce the anxieties of the congregation. If it is not, the community might ask for permission to contact the therapist. If this permission is granted and if the person frees the therapist to talk with the congregation, the matter may be resolved in this manner. If the person refuses to relieve the therapist from confidentiality, the congregation may still choose to contact the therapist, but he or she cannot ethically discuss the situation, even in the most general terms. Realistically, the congregation has only two choices at this point: to let the matter drop and hope and pray that progress will

be forthcoming or to refuse to continue payment for the therapy. Before exercising this latter option, however, the congregation should be morally certain that it would be destructive for the person to continue with this particular therapist.

7. How much accountability do the person in therapy and the therapist have to the congregation?

Legally, neither person is accountable to the congregation. In other words, neither the person nor the therapist is required to discuss the nature or progress of therapy, despite the fact that the congregation may be financing the therapy. However, the hope is that the individual will be sufficiently trustful to apprise the congregation periodically of the progress of therapy and that the congregation will be sufficiently trustworthy so that the person can feel that the shared information will be confidential and not used against him or her in any way.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY IS ESSENTIAL**

Confidentiality in therapy is an important dimension of accountability and means that a therapist may not divulge information without specific and written permission or unless the person is considered to be dangerous to himself/herself or others. Privileged information includes not only the verbal content of the sessions but *all* information, including whether a person has contacted the therapist or is attending or failing to attend sessions, how the person is progressing, whether the person should be relieved of duties, and so on.

In my experience, some therapists have tended to be somewhat casual about confidentiality in their dealings with congregations. Using the rationalization that "it is for Sister's ultimate good" and "the congregation is paying the bills, so they have the right to know," some therapists have been known to violate confidentiality. In fact, when I have politely declined to share privileged information, I have been criticized for not being "as cooperative as the other doctors who see our sisters."

Most, if not all, therapists like people to share a general picture of how therapy is progressing with their congregation. This enables the congregation to be more helpful and prevents the therapist from being misjudged as someone aligned against the congregation. However, when a person does not wish to discuss therapeutic issues with the congregation and requests that the therapist not communicate with the congregation, the therapist has absolutely no choice but to respect these wishes, whether or not he or she agrees.

Even when the therapist has permission to share information, periodic reports to the congregation can present a complex issue for several reasons. First, the situation could imply, even if unintentionally, that the congregation mistrusts the progress reports of the person in therapy. Second, it can

create a student-teacher dynamic between the individual and the therapist in which the "student" consciously or unconsciously works to earn a good report instead of using therapy well. Third, when a therapist conveys information to the congregation, two situations can occur. If the information is the same as that shared by the person in therapy, reporting becomes redundant. On the other hand, if the therapist conveys information that has not been shared with the person, another difficulty may arise. When the person asks what the therapist told the congregation (which he or she has the right to do), the therapist may lie or tell the person something he or she is not ready to hear. In either case, a serious obstacle to therapy is created.

In situations in which it is mutually agreed that it would be helpful to have the therapist communicate with the congregation, it is preferable to have a representative of the congregation meet with the person and the therapist in a three-way dialogue. Thus, everyone will possess the same information at the same time in an open and honest communication.

The one mistake that must be avoided is creating a situation in which the person feels that the congregation and the therapist are talking behind his or her back or that the congregation is directly or indirectly influencing the course of therapy. Once these dynamics arise, the therapeutic relationship will be placed in serious jeopardy.

8. How can a person tell if a therapist is competent?

This can be difficult to ascertain. The psychotherapist is in a unique situation (as is the spiritual director) because his or her work, unlike that of a surgeon or trial lawyer, is ordinarily done in complete privacy. Hence, there is no way to evaluate directly a therapist in action. Also, like most professionals, a therapist may be quite effective with one person and less effective with another.

## **CLIENTS EVALUATING THERAPISTS**

A second problem is that people in therapy are not always the best judge of a therapist's effectiveness. One person may rave about a therapist, describing him or her as very sensitive, compassionate, and supportive, which could be translated as "I love my therapist because he never faces me with the difficult things I should look at or pressures me to make changes in my life that are necessary but that I would dread." Another person may quit therapy after a few sessions, complaining that the therapist was insensitive, uncaring, and thought that religious life was neurotic. In truth, the therapist may be effective, but it may have been this very effectiveness that threatened the person because he or she was not ready for therapy.

A third problem is that little correlation exists between the skills required for being a good teacher, speaker, or writer and those required for

# **Do not create a situation in which the person feels the congregation and therapist are talking behind his or her back**

being a good therapist. An individual may be a great teacher, speaker, or writer, but a generally ineffective therapist.

The best way for a congregation to judge the effectiveness of a therapist is to look at the changes that people have made in their behavior during or after treatment. However, even this criterion has its weaknesses, since the behavioral changes may not coincide with either the congregation's or superior's desires. For example, if the first two people a therapist sees from a congregation leave religious life, the congregation may not view the results as positive, regardless of the fact that the therapist may have done an excellent job.

The best way for an individual to judge a therapist is to agree to see him or her for five or ten sessions and then stop and evaluate the process. Although one would not ordinarily expect to see measurable progress at this point, the individual can evaluate his or her own feelings of success, ambivalence, or failure, possibly with others, to see if they reflect the reality of the situation. Based on these reactions, the person can then decide to continue for another ten sessions and reevaluate or to terminate and try another therapist. Although it may be difficult to start all over again, it may be infinitely more difficult to continue in ineffective therapy or to terminate therapy and not be able to begin again.

9. What part do the religious attitudes of a therapist play in the therapeutic process?

The only legitimate goal of a therapist is to help people make choices that are in the direction of personality growth. Two countertherapeutic situa-

tions can arise with regard to the therapist's religious attitudes. In the first case, the therapist believes that religion or religious life is inimical to personality growth. Accordingly, the therapist has a vested interest in helping the person divest himself or herself of religious values.

## **WHY SOME LEAVE**

In the second case, the therapist possesses religious values that he or she believes the person in therapy should also possess. For example, a particular Catholic therapist may believe that religious should remain members of their communities, despite all other considerations. Consequently, whether consciously or unconsciously, the therapist fails to allow the person to explore seriously any other option, even when such exploration may be psychologically and spiritually necessary for personality growth.

10. Why does a certain percentage of people leave religious life as a result of therapy?

Four basic reasons may help explain this occurrence. First, some of these people were never really in religious life or left it before entering therapy. That is, although they took vows, lived in religious communities, and performed apostolic works, they never had made a psychological and/or spiritual commitment to religious life. As a result, they live on the periphery, never truly participating in the struggles that create growth or taking advantage of the resources religious life has to offer. If therapy can help these people realize that they have been living a "neither fish nor fowl" existence, they are faced with the decision of either strengthening their religious commitment or choosing a different life-style. In my experience, most people choose the latter alternative.

Second, the religious commitments of some who enter therapy, while sincere and lived fully, have been based on immature motives. As these people progress in therapy, they outgrow their original motives for entering religious life. At this point, they are faced with developing more positive, mature motives and rechoosing religious life or opting for another life that they feel would be more personally fulfilling. In my experience, as many people in this category rechoose religious life as leave it.

Third, some people burn out in religious life and feel that living in a new environment is necessary to resuscitate themselves. This is not to say that every person who experiences burnout should leave religious life. However, for some the nature and extent of their burnout is such that they need a temporary or permanent change of environment to renew themselves.

Fourth, a person may have made an authentic decision to take vows and has lived religious life maturely and well. However, in the process of therapy, he or she may grow to a point where different and important needs and values emerge, which

lead the person to a different life choice. For many people, this situation is the most difficult to understand. For them, to leave religious life means that a person *must* have made a mistake somewhere along the way. Yet this is not necessarily true. The idea that a person can cooperate with grace and at the same time choose to leave religious life is both psychologically and theologically cogent.

In general, it seems that at least as many people who seek therapy remain in religious life as leave it. Further, although those who do leave are lost to their individual religious communities, they are often better able to live a Christian life, which is the predominant value.

#### **PERSONALITY OR ENVIRONMENT**

A related issue deals with the axiom often heard when the subject of people leaving religious life is discussed, namely: "If people are experiencing problems in religious life, they will take their problems with them; hence, they might as well remain and wrestle with them there." This principle is not always true. Analogously, if, for example, a woman has a brain tumor, she will take it wherever she goes. But if she has developed an allergy to pollen, she will experience relief whenever she enters a pollen-free environment. An important part of therapy is to help people distinguish between problems that are a part of their personalities and those that are exacerbated by the environment.

In summary, if the following dimensions of empathy are appreciated, the relationship between the congregation, the person in therapy, and the therapist can be mutually helpful.

The first point of empathy concerns the congregation. Congregations are often placed in a double bind. If they take an active interest in the problems and therapy of a person, they can be perceived as meddling and manipulative. If they remain detached, they can be perceived as distant and rejecting.

The second dimension of empathy touches on the dilemma of individuals in therapy. If they com-

**That a person can cooperate with grace within the community and choose to leave religious life is psychologically and theologically cogent**

municate their difficulties to the congregation, they open themselves to being discounted by the congregation; if they do not, they can be perceived as uncooperative or recalcitrant.

The final point of empathy deals with the therapist. When therapists do what is psychologically best for those in therapy, they risk being perceived as insensitive to the needs of the congregation. When they allow the needs of the congregation to influence therapy, they could be doing a disservice to the person in treatment.

Therapy, under the simplest and best conditions, is a delicate process. The more people involved with the person in therapy, the more therapy can be made easier or more difficult, depending on the cooperation, understanding, and good will of all concerned.

# MOURNING

## Is A Healing of the Heart

MARIAN COWAN, C.S.J.

**I**n pursuing the beatitudes one is confronted with a series of paradoxes. Perhaps the strangest of these is

Blessed, happy, are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.

How can a person be happy and mourning at the same time? Mourning is a time of sadness, not gladness. It is a time for grieving, for coming to grips with loss, and loss is painful. In many societies it is a time of quiet withdrawal, of loneliness and—for some—loneliness. Yet Jesus, looking out over the crowd, declared, "Happy are those who mourn." If there was ever a pair of opposite conditions, this is it.

What does Jesus see that prompts him to point to mourning as one of the special invitations to happiness? Does he see faces filled with anguish, hardened by harsh reality, or softened by losses borne well? Does he see eyes still wet with tears? People who live with loss as with a companion—loss of loved ones, loss of limb and livelihood, loss of freedom? Directing the gaze of his disciples, he teaches them to notice, to look for the signs of the mourner, to learn what is hidden there.

Who are the blessed who are able to mourn? They are those who are able to feel, who can allow themselves to let down their defenses and give in to the experience of loss. Mourning means to be able to let emotions surface and then give expression to them, to be able to dissolve into tears of sorrow or com-

passion, to know firsthand what it means to be broken-hearted. Different cultures call for different expressions of these emotions, some more demonstrative than others. But first the feelings have to be acknowledged. The healthy person confronts loss directly, allowing the strong accompanying feelings to surface and coping with them appropriately.

### LOSSES CREATE CRISIS

Actually a moment of loss presents us with a choice, an option for health or an option for unhealth. Picture yourself at such a moment, perhaps the death of someone close to you. What do you feel after the first shock wave of loss passes through you? Do you decide to face it stoically, not letting it touch you with its pain? Or do you decide to live this experience to the full, beginning with facing death? Of course it is not a simple either/or choice; it is a continuum of possible responses to crisis. Also, many of us do not make a deliberate decision to respond this way or that; we simply do what comes naturally.

What comes naturally for some people is to stay at the denial stage forever. They bottle up their feelings and never let them come even close to the

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# THE CRISIS OF LOSS

Awareness  
of  
Serious  
Loss

A  
CHOICE

FACE THE LOSS  
STOICALLY  
(Not Letting  
Pain Touch You  
Or Show)

UNHEALTHY

HEALTHY

IMMATURE

MATURE

Comfort  
Wholeness  
Peace  
Joy

GOD HEALING  
OTHERS SUPPORTING

LIVE THE EXPERIENCE  
TO THE FULL—  
MOURNING  
(Entering Into Sorrow  
Intentionally)

**REMEMBER: The Lord is Near to the Brokenhearted (Psalm 34 Verse 19)**

surface. Their pain is often intense, but for any number of reasons, they cannot risk the possibility of being out of control. Perhaps they think that they must remain strong so that others can lean on them. Perhaps they look on tears as a sign of weakness. Maybe their emotions have been capped years ago, and they would love to let them out but cannot. They feel their heart as a stone inside of them, and in their misery they are unable to mourn. Sometimes this attitude is forced on other people, family members in particular.

I am reminded of a man who could not face his father's death. Joe forbade any of his family to attend the dying man because he thought he should spare them the need to express their feelings, which were bound to arise. When death came, a priest friend was with Joe and tried to help him. Joe came near to tears and then, with effort, regained his

stoic composure—so near to mourning and yet unable to step across the threshold from his self-control. How hard that was for Joe and for his whole family. Not one of them was allowed to grieve openly. How different and how healing it could have been if they had mourned together.

To be able to mourn means that one is not hard of heart. It means to be so deeply touched by loss that one actually is healed by it. Tears are a natural bodily release for sadness, yet so many of us are reluctant to use them. Men especially, in many cultures, have been denied the healing that can only come from weeping. Just recently, this taboo has been changing in American culture. I remember well my ten-year-old nephew standing at the side of his dead father and struggling "manfully" to hold back his tears. It was a moment of grace when his uncle, tears in his own eyes, walked over, put his

arm around the boy's shoulders, and said, "There is nothing wrong with a man crying at an appropriate time. This is an appropriate time."

### **HEART-MENDING REQUIRES GOD**

Mourning is a healing process. It is the time for working through the stages of death and dying, not a time for masking pain with pious platitudes as excuses for not feeling deeply. It is a time for cutting through the layers of self-preservation and laying open the heart to be touched and healed. The experience of death—any kind of death—is an experience of separation, a rending, a tearing apart. The patterns of one's life are sundered. The heart is broken. Mending of the heart involves sorrow, the acknowledgment of brokenness, and hope for wholeness once again. Sorrow is not an evil to be fled; it is a process of mending, of healing, begun by plunging oneself deep within the sorrow to the place where one can begin to feel whole again. In so doing, one experiences the dropping away of the facade of independence and self-sufficiency and comes home to where the Divine Consoler can effect the healing process.

Despite these insights, when disaster strikes, how do we frequently find people approaching mourning? Trying to escape it. Trying to forget it. Fighting it. Friends attempt to distract the grieving person, afraid to leave the mourner alone lest grief become too overwhelming. Mourning needs time and space. All too often the mourning process is put off because friends and relatives crowd into the waking hours, trying their best to console. People's efforts are important for this, but not as a distraction. They should allow the quiet solitude in which the grieving process can begin as well as attempt to facilitate that process. It was 4:00 AM when I received word of my brother's death. I truly appreciated the quiet presence of my best friend about an hour after the word was given to me. But I also know how much that hour of solitude was needed first.

### **COMMUNITY CAN ASSIST**

There are two dimensions to coping with the death of someone we love. One part is the mourning of our loss. The other is the celebration of our loved one's entry into new life. The community of believers can be of immense help in both of these adaptations. In July of 1981, two of my sister religious were killed in an automobile accident between Tucson and Phoenix. Sister Clare Dunn was in her fourth term as congresswoman in the Arizona legislature. Sister Judy Lovchik was Clare's legislative assistant. They worked together for the people of Arizona, trying to effect just legislation and being a voice for the poor. When they were killed, the governor said simply and sadly, "The legislature has lost its moral conscience." Many, many

**Mending of the heart  
involves sorrow,  
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once again**

people gathered in Tucson to weep together and to bury these two women whose lives had often been put on the line for social justice. The night before the funeral, their pastor led in prayer those assembled by calling them to mourn. "Tomorrow we celebrate," he said. "Tonight we mourn." That is the way of the Christian, and mourning is not complete without celebration.

Although the physical death of a loved one may head the list of causes for mourning, there are many other losses over which we grieve. Any lengthy separation from one we love needs its time of mourning also, whether it be temporary, because of distance, or permanent, because of the severing of a relationship, especially if rejection is part of the experience. Aside from losing another person, however, there are other losses that demand the same process. Some of these are the loss of self-esteem or the esteem of others, the loss of a special support group, the loss of a position or a secure situation. Actually, the loss of anything treasured as valuable is a cause, in varying degrees, for mourning.

### **HEALTHY HANDLING OF GUILT**

Sinfulness is also something to be mourned. The process is a much healthier way of handling guilt than either suppressing true guilt or wallowing in false guilt. Sinfulness comes in two varieties: personal and communal. Personal sinfulness, while always having some effect on society, may be an extremely private affair, and the mourning of this sinfulness by an individual may or may not be

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## **Deep in the human psyche is the remembrance of a world without sin and violence and corruption**

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known by other people. Social sinfulness, on the other hand, ranges from evil perpetrated by one individual on another to the magnitude of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the holocaust of millions of Jews. It can be subtle as a person's failure to insist on the proper strength of steel used for construction or as blatant as dumping nuclear waste near the homes of people without first alerting them to the danger and obtaining their consent. The insidious part of social sinfulness is that guilt is diffuse and cannot be made only the burden of those who do the actual deed or make the decision and give the order. The guilt must also be borne by the society that allows such evil, either supporting it knowingly or, in culpable ignorance, remaining blissfully unaware of what is going on. Yet the healing process of mourning can be brought to social evil only by those who can acknowledge their part in it.

Deep in the human psyche is the remembrance of a world without sin and violence and corruption. That world, fresh and young, was called Eden. Along with this collective memory is the desire, the yearning, to be able to say once again, "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world." In between the memory and the yearning is the experience of loss—loss of harmony and consonance and of all things working together for the good of all. The closer one comes to experiencing this lack, in self or in others, the more likely is one to experience a concomitant mourning. Injustice, greed, selfish misuse of the world's resources, violence, getting ahead at the expense of other people, oppression, self-aggrandizement, deception, cheating—all of

these give the committed Christian cause to grieve and, sometimes, to blush with shame.

### **COLLECTIVE GUILT A PROBLEM**

We mourn our sinfulness when we expose guilt in a healthy way. It is sometimes difficult enough to handle this process when it involves a personal guilt. But let us turn our attention for a moment to collective guilt, our national or community sinfulness. This is harder, and many people do not know what to do with it. I remember meeting a lawyer from Washington, D.C., some years ago on a plane. He was on his way to Denver to conduct public hearings on nuclear waste. I remarked that, although I had been away from Denver for five days, I did not recall hearing about these impending sessions on television or reading about them in the newspaper before I had left. The lawyer replied something like this, "The government isn't really interested in what the public has to say; it simply wants to be able to claim that it held public hearings. Besides, the people don't really want to know the truth about the threat connected with nuclear waste and that we have never put adequate time or money into research about how to dispose of it while we keep on proliferating it. The people don't want to know because it's too big a problem; they don't know what to do with it. It scares them, so they'd rather not know about it."

Once again, project yourself into a situation: you, a citizen of the United States, have just come across the information that a certain multinational corporation based in the United States and whose products you enjoy is exploiting the poor in Latin America to obtain the raw materials it needs. You are shocked. Then you see data attesting to other companies doing the same thing. These are big name corporations you have come to trust because their products are household words, brand names you have counted on for years. What is your first reaction? "There must be some mistake. These corporations are run by responsible people." Denial. What happens next? Anger. Anger at the company. Anger that, without even knowing it, you and millions of other Americans have contributed to the exploitation by insisting on this particular brand. You feel victimized, conned into being an unwitting accomplice in a worldwide scandal. While multinationals' advertising campaigns have lured first world people into turning their wants into needs, they have been draining third world countries of their natural resources, letting those impoverished people buy them back only at prices beyond their meager income.

### **CRUCIAL MOMENT OF CONVERSION**

The poor have become victimized, and you, too, have been made a victim of consumerism—on the opposite end of the scale. "But the problem is so big

and I am so small," you say. "What am I to do?" The bargaining process begins with, "What difference could it possibly make if I, one person, cease to use these products? Besides, these companies are not all bad; they do some very good things. My community, my family, will consider me some sort of radical if I let this affect me." You can let the excuses build interminably and block the process, or you can find yourself refusing to take the easy way out. If you choose the latter route, the feeling of helplessness may increase; depression may set in. All the evils of the world seem to come into new perspective, each one touching you as an aspect of a people who suddenly seem narrow minded and selfish, bent on living the good life no matter what it costs others. This is the crucial moment. It is confrontational, scary, and filled with the grace of conversion.

What are the choices before you? Will you drop the whole thing, shaking it off and relegating it to that part of yourself marked "Danger: High Explosives"? Or will you stay with the questions and accept the costly grace held out to you, breathe a deep sigh of relinquishment, and lifting your eyes to the Father, say, "My God, have mercy on us. We are sinners." This is what it means to mourn our common sinfulness, to grieve over what our people have wrought while we have allowed ourselves the comfortable ignorance that did not stop it.

The people of each nation share a common sinfulness. When the individual can say "we" in regard to that sinfulness, the redemption of that nation, that people, has begun. Mourning on this level ordinarily does not stop with the acknowledgment of our brokenness; it simply changes at that point into action. If the mourning has been a fully human act, that is, carried out in relation to God as well as to other human beings, then reconciliation begins to take a tangible form, still under the direction of grace. This all occurs within the process of grieving and changing mourning into joy.

## BLOCKS TO HEALING

The process can be blocked anywhere along the line. For instance, in mourning a death, some people take a strange, maudlin satisfaction in clinging to the mourner's role. This behavior is clearly a block to healing and a sign of un-health. But it feels safe for those who want to feel sorry for themselves and relish other people's pity. Those who fall into this trap hide within the grieving process so that they

do not need to face the rest of reality. The healthy person, on the other hand, realizes that grief has its time but that there comes a time to put aside the mourner's role.

In mourning our social sinfulness, a person may easily get stuck at the stage of feeling anger. This block is a ready refuge for the person who has carried a lot of buried anger from childhood and who now has a target for these feelings. Repressed anger sometimes explodes into violence, and blocked healing begets the terrorist. The healthy person, however, can handle the challenge to proceed through all the stages of mourning, even to the acceptance of guilt, and to channel the anger into something positive like social activism. True to self in the process, the choice of a healthy response at each point along the way keeps the person from becoming stalled and unable to reach a stage of peace and joy again.

There are many ways to respond to disaster, ways that lead to greater anguish and ways that lead to blessing. As long as one clings to sorrow, fights sorrow, or suppresses sorrow, it remains only sorrow, with all its pain. Sadness and mourning are integral parts of life, forming a rhythm with joy. While one is grieving, an important process of healing is taking place. The experience of loss, the broken-heartedness, is giving way to integration, and the person who has felt so terribly vulnerable now turns attention outward having looked reality straight in the eye and having been blessed by it.

Blessed, happy, are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How do I live the third beatitude?
- What do I do when someone close to me is mourning?
- How do I handle social sinfulness?
- Have I ever felt the healing power of grief?

## RECOMMENDED READING

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# MOSTLY IT TAKES

JAMES TORRENS, S.J.

Mostly it takes us years  
and second chances to untwist,  
relax our faces, admit to someone  
"Sorry" about some old thing.  
Years to come out well.  
Like the desert plant nobody has seen  
bloom ever, but the expert says  
"Wait" and one day, Surprise!  
it unfolds brilliantly. And what a  
fragrance! Mostly it takes years.

and not up to date; "I do not think that they will sing to me."

Eliot's lines are still up to date. Some people stand around regretting lost youth; we call it depression. Others push themselves to prove they haven't lost it. Meanwhile America practices its cult of youthfulness—its celebration of frantic energy, its favoritism for hotshot young executives and technicians, its cosmetology. This is all a denial of death. Rather than accepting our natural condition and looking to it as a gateway, we fear death, are obsessed with death.

Rilke the poet, in his *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, looked at death as a realm continually interpenetrating with life, sending its angels to us and receiving us. We who receive the Eucharist often do not always recall that this bread of immortality, the body of Jesus risen, makes us participants in another realm.

The evidences of what Teilhard de Chardin called our "passivities of diminishment," aging as a process always underway, need not be a fright. So much depends on how we receive gifts, the ones that come when we are hoping for something else: the loss of friends, vigor, glamour, sharpness of one of the senses, or memory; loss also of some ground or status as a pro or a careerwoman, as a housemother or a kingpin. Such reminders of mortality drive people at all stages, perhaps especially those in the last, to tranquilizers and sedatives and often to the liquor store. How sad that our advanced society has life so wrong, that it fosters in people somehow the fear of becoming discards.

Father Hans von Balthasar has some moving words from a different perspective in *Heart of the World*. Time, he says, removes our fingers from

**M**y mother in her eighty-sixth year has lost none of her sharp interest in the world around her and still utters her gratitude for each day granted her. Still, she has pointed out to me more than once, "Jim, it's hard to be old." To watch her at this stage and attend to her makes me conscious of my own life, all of our lives, slipping away. Just beyond the peak is downhill. So, at least, we are tempted to think.

Tom Eliot, an undergraduate at Harvard circa 1914, conjured up in poetry a young adult named J. Alfred Prufrock, already in a rut, the fires of initiative already banked. "I grow old, I grow old," this character complains. I had better do something daring, he thinks; "I shall wear the bottom of my trousers rolled." He frets about his appearance and figure, painfully self-conscious: "Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" And as to the mermaids, the young ladies, well, I'm balding

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# YEARS

around whatever we clutch, teaching us to give ourselves away and showing us to Whom:

In one and the same act He clothes you out of love and strips you out of love; He presses all treasures into your hand and the most precious jewel of all, to love Him in return; and nevertheless again takes away everything He has given so that you love not the gift but the giver, and so that you know, even in giving, that you are but a wave in His stream.

The most encouraging people on this planet seem to fall into two classes, those flinging themselves and their energies into some heroic human service and those who grow old gracefully. Jesus did not have a chance to grow old. Or did he, full of wisdom and grace, as he showed himself from the start? Although the embittered elderly are a terror (a sadness rather, if we really understood), the weathered face with the glad spark and the direct contemplative interest cheers everyone.

The key seems to be our concept of maturity. Maturity—readiness for the picking! Length of life comes as a special providence for many of us—we are such slow learners! It takes so long to learn love nonpossessively, anger that can go down with the sun, forgiveness that is not just the mark of a patsy, inventiveness that will cheer the gloomy, and understanding of God's closeness and ways. These are the habits that help a person shape events rather than be at their mercy.

This is the wisdom that the Chinese, the Africans, and so many others attribute to grandparents and elders. We should not make the wrong claims on its behalf, for none of us is easily fooled. That vaunted experience of the elderly can seem shaky indeed, with the world changing at such a rate and all fields of endeavor so hard to keep up with. Even self-understanding, in the course of what T. S. Eliot called "the rendering pain of re-enactment of all that you have done, and been," is so elusive.

Hence Eliot, in the great poem of his later years, "Four Quartets," which addresses aging as an opportunity for redeeming time, made a difficult point: "Do not let me hear of the wisdom of old men. . . . The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility." Yet this humility is the very opposite of learned helplessness, which afflicts so many in nursing homes. In our profound awareness of that paralytic state wherein we are lowered continually before the Divine, we know with what life he graces and fills us unto the end.

Fortunately, diminishing expertise, drive, or physical sharpness does not have to mean loss of interest. Quite the contrary in these days of continuing education and second and third careers, as fostered by such enterprises of adult learning as the Fromm Institute at the University of San Francisco. Nor do we lose the accumulations of our history. Lee Cobb, when called toward the end of his life to act King Lear in a New York production, admitted that it had been a lifelong ambition of his to play this part. He explained why: "Because the old are so much more interesting than anyone else; so much more has happened to them." And they are still such resources. In my Jesuit university community, the best classicists, the best Church historians, the best social activists, and the best-read individuals are, right now, the retired people.

According to Anne Marie Kaune in *The Catholic Worker* (October-November 1981), it was only with reluctance that Dorothy Day called her last few years her retirement. "She would go on to note that the Buddhists revere old age as the valuable third stage of life, a time of contemplation and deepening in wisdom in preparation for the next life—how much richer than retirement." A Little Brother of the Gospel, Giorgio, remarked: "I am amazed to see how she lived the last years of her life as a poor woman . . . There was such a light in her eyes, a light from someplace else."

Three years ago Father Leo Madigan, an elderly Jesuit at the University of San Francisco, noted

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## Aging as a vocation is precisely the calling to us to be late bloomers

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for his puns and *bons mots*, who had spent his life in parish work, died, leaving a large sheaf of personal notes that stretched back for years. Some of Madigan's best sayings, far from being spontaneous, turn out to have been carefully culled from his reading: "live—don't mildew"; "purgatory is God's I.C.U.;" "bald-headed priest—visible head of the Church." He also had marvelous and very humble reflections on his own state: "I'm going through energy crisis"; "just sitting here doing my spiritual

knitting"; "no harder labor than enforced idleness."

Madigan's spiritual insights, kept entirely for himself, are wonderful: "loneliness of retired priests—God's last gift to wean them from applause of friends to Himself"; "instinctively relax in indwelling—intimate commune—instead of books, papers, etc., most profitable and pleasing"; "Lord, make me 'feel at home' with you, filial, intimate, so we won't be strangers at death." And his humor never deserted him: "No one is completely useless. I can at least serve as a horrible example." Horrible nothing! A person like Madigan never fully departs; even when setting off to God, he continues very much around.

The central task of maturing (progressing to a ripe age), again as Eliot tells it (he learned from Dante), is paradoxically to achieve the innocence of youth. This youth that we sometimes glimpse in the elderly (particularly some nuns) consists of the kind of trust spoken of in Psalm 131: instinctive humor, closeness to God, simplicity of concerns, and reconciliation (no more paranoia about "them" or bitterness about some "her" or "him"). F. L. Lucas says about that kind of youth: "In real life the finest characters become simpler as their lives draw toward their close—not because they have grown less subtle, but because their values have grown clearer."

We say in amazement about certain people that he or she is really blossoming. This can be said of them at any age, but it generally means there has been some delay in the normal rhythm and indicates a pleasant surprise at a development that more than compensates. Aging as a vocation is precisely the calling to be late bloomers.

# A PSYCHOSPIRITUAL VIEW OF MASTURBATION

WILLIAM F. KRAFT, Ph.D.

**B**efore Vatican II sexuality in religious life was rarely discussed. Although sexual problems and possibilities are now faced more openly, masturbation is still an ambiguous and ambivalent issue. In the past, most Catholic religious and lay people were taught that masturbation was one of the worst sins and possibly a cause of mental illness. It seemed that masturbation generally evoked more guilt than did hostility or injustice. Masturbation could be the purchase price of a one-way ticket to hell.

Such an overemphasis on sexual sins was caused by many factors, especially rationalistic and puritanical approaches that minimized or even demonized the incarnational aspect of Christianity. Whatever the reasons, sexuality was seen as "lower" or as a temptation rather than as a gift and an opportunity from God for spiritual and psychological growth.

From being conditioned in a negative milieu, our approach toward celibacy usually was to ignore or repress sexuality; such denial, however, increased rather than purged tension. We often paid the price of sexual repression: frustration, anxiety, and guilt. Rather than listening to the message of our uncomfortable feelings, we sincerely tried to silence their redemptive truth. We escaped self-

confrontation by overindulgence (eating, drinking, working), by irritable behavior (toward authorities, peers, or subjects), or by acting out (with others or self in fantasy and/or reality). When masturbation (acting out) was the coping mechanism for repressed or nonintegrated sexuality, a circular and frustrating causality would often emerge: masturbation relieves tension, then evokes guilt, which engenders tension, which leads to masturbation, and so on circularly.

In the nineteenth century masturbation was considered a cause of mental and physical illness. In 1912, Freud proposed that masturbation could be considered normal (though not to be fostered) in the young but that adult masturbation should be seen as a fixation at the "infantile," self-oriented level of development. Kinsey's studies (1948 and 1953) made masturbation seem more "normal" by showing that it may help people cope better while reducing uncomfortable symptoms. Currently, masturbation is recommended by many sex educators and therapists to both adults and

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nonadults as a means of releasing tension or knowing and actualizing one's body.

## DISCOMFORT ASSUMED WRONG

Today many mental health specialists consider masturbation to be a sensible source of pleasure, a convenient stress reducer, a productive way to realize body awareness and potential, and in general a healthy practice. It is important to realize that such approaches are based on personal and professional assumptions that posit tension reduction and individual satisfaction as ultimate goals. Satisfying "my own needs," contending that "my body is mine," and having "good feelings" are conventional motives. Since discomfort is often assumed to be indicative of something wrong, spiritual practices like creative suffering, mortification, and even sublimation are judged to be masochistic, old-fashioned, or simply naive or dumb.

From a psychospiritual perspective, the position here is to support neither the new nor the old positions. My contention is that masturbation is seldom unhealthy in and of itself. On the other hand, unlike many professionals, I do not think that it should be recommended as a healthy practice. It is not a one-way ticket to hell, nor is it a one-way pass to heaven. Masturbation is an earthly matter. My position is that the practice is neither unhealthy nor healthy. Rather it is a conventional way of reducing tension, evoking pleasure, and coping with life.

Sociologically, masturbation is regarded as normal in that most people at some time in their lives practice it. It falls within the category of expected behavior. Psychologically, masturbation can be considered normal because it can temporarily reduce tension and make life easier. But remember: most models of mental health incorporate the physical and psychosocial but not the spiritual dimension; thus from their perspective masturbation is seen as "healthy." Although masturbation can be considered psychologically normal, I contend that it is not healthy, for it impedes spiritual growth—the paramount dynamic of healthy living.

In light of these introductory remarks, I want to examine the sense and nonsense of masturbation, particularly in regard to healthy living. My main interest now is to investigate how masturbation can impede as well as challenge spiritual growth.

## MASTURBATION EXAMINED IN CONTEXT

To analyze the dynamics of masturbation, it is important to understand the life of the masturbator. In other words, the act should be seen in light of a total process. One element of this total context is age. For example, adolescents more than children and adults feel the urgency and confusion of new genital desires along with peer and cultural pressure to satisfy them. An adult who has repressed genital feelings may masturbate for rea-

sons that are similar to those of an adolescent (urgency, novelty, pleasure, etc.). Nevertheless, the adult's intentions, which can be seen in their desires and fantasies, would usually differ from an adolescent's.

Frequency and intensity are also important variables. Masturbation once a month differs from once a day in terms of its psychological and spiritual impact. In the case of compulsive masturbation, the habit is a significant part of one's life; without masturbation, an experiential and behavioral void would quickly develop. In contrast, there are people who usually abstain from masturbation but periodically act out for a relatively short time. Such people follow a cyclic pattern. They build up tension, which they remove by masturbation, and then the behavior ceases until tension increases again.

Intensity also plays an important part. The amount of time invested along with the quantity and quality of self-involvement affects the kind of effect masturbation has on one's life. For example, a person who masturbates daily for an hour with intense fantasy as the only source of interpersonal intimacy will differ significantly from a person who masturbates infrequently and who has healthy experiences of intimacy.

Sometimes we fail to recognize the more obvious, simple, and seductive dynamics of masturbation. Masturbation is particularly seductive because it is an easy and accessible way to reduce tension and to explore genital feelings and fantasies without interpersonal vulnerability. You can masturbate almost any time and any place you feel like doing so. You need not worry about other people or social consequences, for it can be kept privately to yourself.

## FANTASY IS SAFELY SECRET

Part of the seduction is that masturbation usually involves the safe secrecy of fantasy wherein we do not have to risk rejection, embarrassment, or failure. Rather we can have the illusion of being invulnerable, open, and perfect. Instead of engaging in mature relationships, we can create a world of make-believe people where anything is possible and there are no limits. Risk and responsibility are absent while the illusion of complete pleasure and fulfillment prevails. In a sense, masturbation can satisfy interpersonal yearnings while remaining an individual affair. In fantasy we can explore the world of sexual intimacy without leaving our room or, more radically, ourselves. Masturbation can lead to an affair with oneself.

We stand on precarious ground when fantasy becomes our main source of intimacy and fulfillment. When fantasy fosters growth, it is healthy, but when fantasy impedes or violates growth, it is immature and unhealthy. Some people find themselves caught between reality and fantasy. Although

they engage in fulfilling social relationships, their sexual relationships exist only in fantasy. The challenge to them is to integrate their social and sexual as well as spiritual relationships.

A key dynamic of adult masturbation is that the initial impulse often emerges out of nongenital experiences. More than genital gratification is involved. An adult is often moved to masturbate by experiences such as boredom, anxiety, and loneliness. Masturbation can numb the discomfort of alienation and incompleteness as well as provide some semblance of being one with the self and with others. The frustrating irony, however, is that the escape it offers from loneliness hinders us in attaining our natural goal of adulthood intimacy.

Masturbation often involves a yearning for intimacy and completeness. This dynamic can even be seen in the structural and functional changes of sexual excitement; our body visibly reaches out for more than ourselves. Fantasy can also manifest our attempt to be intimate with another—or trying to go beyond ourselves. This transcendent dynamic can be considered a manifestation and affirmation of a social and spiritual aspect of genital arousal.

The Spirit in and of sex passionately affirms that we are more than isolated individuals who should look out only for ourselves. Our sexual desires remind us that we are linked to one another—that our nature is to be connected to community. Ultimately, sex seeks the source of our community: the Love that motivates us to be members of the same Body.

### CANDIDATES FOR MASTURBATION

Ironically, though Christianity is an embodied religion—an incarnated way to God—we still minimize the embodiment of spirituality. This lack of integral Christian living can cause many problems, one of which is the pressure to masturbate. If spiritual life were more incarnated, there could be less need to masturbate, but a disembodied spirituality (as well as a despiritualized embodiment) eventually results in frustration and tension, which are common motives for masturbation.

Religious (or any persons) who live highly cerebral lives are candidates for masturbation. "Living from the neck up" increases the yearning to "live from the neck down." People, for example, who deal mainly with the abstract and theoretical, seldom enjoying the concrete and experiential, can be seduced by masturbation's false promises of fulfillment. Their lack of embodiment in everyday living creates tension that can be lessened with masturbation. In masturbation, these "thinkaholics" can cut off their heads, as it were, and relax without analytical thinking. They feel enormous relief from tension in their return to earth. Such embodiment, however, gives temporary relief at best and does not foster permanent growth.

Other religious people prefer living from the

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neck down to living from the neck up. They absolutize the truth found in feelings and affective sharing to the point that embodiment is overstressed at the expense of cognitive and spiritual truth. Sexuality is overemphasized, which causes considerable tension, which seeks relief, which causes guilt, and so on. Some religious fall into this pattern in reaction to past sexual oppression and repression, for example, a sister who was conditioned to put a tight lid on her sexual feelings or a brother whose style was extremely cognitive. Recent religious freedom to pursue friendships along with cultural license to satisfy personal needs can easily invite these religious to burst out of their affective cocoon. Sex for them easily becomes an overwhelming concern. Because of past repression and new pressures to express their sexuality, a tendency to go to the opposite extreme, along with practicing masturbation, is not surprising.

Workaholic religious, who are compulsively project oriented and who are so busy that they seldom take time out simply to be, are also candidates for masturbation. An attractive feature of masturbation is that by using this means, one does take time to slow down, rest, and relax. Obviously, a key therapeutic challenge is to look behind the mask of masturbation in order to restructure one's life in ways that foster more embodied and integrated living.

### CONSEQUENCES OF MASTURBATION

The folly of masturbation is that we silence the Spirit urging us to love. We abort an opportunity for growth and end up being more empty and

## MAIN MESSAGE OF MASTURBATORY ACTS



lonely. Although masturbation can to some extent satisfy our yearning for intimacy and transcendence, its satisfaction is momentary and not growth oriented. Masturbation turns our spirit inward and we become intimate with ourselves while impeding what we really want—authentic intimacy with another.

A danger of frequent masturbation is narcissism. A habitual masturbator is pressured to live according to immediate gratification and to see life and other people in terms of self-satisfaction. As a result, when entering into a personal relationship (celibate or marital), the masturbator can unconsciously view another as someone to be used for his or her own satisfaction. Although such selfish motives may be unconscious and rooted in the past, they nevertheless influence the way we interact in the present.

Masturbation can also reinforce the periphery of

our personality by maximizing our physicality while minimizing our spirituality. Focusing on the immediacy of bodily satisfaction interferes with the permanence of spiritual fulfillment. Any sexual gratification without Spirit involves superficial contact that can lead to shallow living. Engaging in nonintegrated or unchaste sex eventually leads to more frustration, for what we seek—integral and ongoing growth—eludes us. When our body is over-emphasized, our spirit weakens. And when our spiritual life is disembodied, our spirit becomes bland and insipid.

Pornography, which can feed our sexual fantasy and increase the likelihood of masturbation, also diminishes our spirit while glorifying the flesh. Pornography is material or behavior the primary purpose of which is to excite us genitalily. Especially if we are tense and intense disembodied thinkaholics or workaholics, pornography offers an easy,

safe, and pleasurable experience. As contrasted with our normal lives, we need not analyze or study; we can allow ourselves to be pleased. Our world, however, becomes so primarily or totally sexual that our perception of reality is unreal. Since our awareness of reality is curtailed, we see and treat others, as well as ourselves, as less than we are.

Frequent masturbation minimizes and even represses the Spirit—the source of freedom. We hurt and hinder ourselves when we get caught in a spiritless world that leaves us with a tunnel vision of reality. Rather than respecting reality's unfolding truth, we futilely try to write our own script according to what we want and need. We can end up confused in a barren land of impoverished and partially unreal possibilities. Sometimes, considerable mortification is needed to lessen our body's yearning for genital gratification. It is not an easy task. Not unlike the alcoholic whose body craves a drink, the masturbator must learn to say "no" in service of a healthy affirmation.

### **HELPING OURSELVES AND OTHERS**

When helping ourselves or others, we should distinguish between therapeutic help and normative evaluation. Part of being a pilgrim consists in bearing the tension between what is and what should be. Normatively, I consistently propose that masturbation should not be either condoned or recommended. In service of preserving and promoting norms, I offer my viewpoints via teaching, writing, or conversation. I feel that as people who are responsible to others we are called to proclaim our vision, particularly to the young. I believe, for instance, that when adolescents are subtly encouraged to masturbate they are being cheated. They are also cheated when they are not given a point of view, for without a viewpoint, dialogue fails and growth lags.

On the other hand, a therapeutic approach suspends the normative evaluation in service of exploring the sense and nonsense of masturbation. When we are asked or when we think it is our responsibility, we give our standards; otherwise, clinically we accept (neither condone nor reinforce) masturbation and encourage the person to enter the process of self-exploration through self-disclosure. Although we should not sanction masturbation for the self or for others, we can face masturbation without condemnation or recommendation in order to achieve spiritual growth.

It is difficult to help pastorally and normatively because our educational programs for coping with and integrating sexual desires are often very deficient. Typically, many adolescents as well as most adults are left with two options: to repress or to satisfy. Actually, such a choice offers very little freedom. Or we are told to "integrate" sexuality. But when we ask how, very few helpful responses are given. Because the attitudes we form in adoles-

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cence often carry us through, or at least have a significant influence on, the rest of our lives, our adolescent sexual experiences and the ways we sexually educate adolescents are very important in the formation of future sexual attitudes and behavior patterns.

Since many past controls have been removed or lessened, people can be easily thrown into crisis. For example, religious who were conditioned to repress or constrict sexual awareness may now be encouraged to explore and experiment. Moreover, although many negative structures have been taken away, not many have been replaced with sound pastoral and normative guidelines.

To help oneself and others, it is important to look behind the mask of masturbation and see what is hidden and neglected. We have noted that masturbation is often a sign of more basic issues like disembodiment, functionalism, affectivism, and aborted spirituality. Usually one part of our lives (activity, thinking, feeling) is maximized, sexuality is not integrated, or feelings (loneliness, boredom, frustration) are avoided. Masturbatory acts say something about our whole lives. Their main message is that our sexuality (embodiment) and spirituality are not well integrated.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR INTEGRATION**

To move closer to the ideal of integration, the following suggestions may be helpful. It is foolish to underestimate the force of habit. Sometimes we assume that insight alone will enable us to change our feelings and behavior. Whereas insight can engender more freedom and control, our bodies can

# INFLUENCING SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

## PRESENT

1  
ADOLESCENT SEXUAL  
EXPERIENCES

2  
SEXUAL EDUCATION  
OF ADOLESCENTS

FILMS • TELEVISION •  
SCHOOL • PEERS •  
PARENTS • CHURCH

## FUTURE

SEXUAL ATTITUDES  
AND BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

be conditioned to yearn for tranquilizing but negative experiences. Masturbation gives immediate rewards that reinforce the habit and increase the likelihood of recurrence. It can become so much a part of our behavioral repertoire that eliminating it can leave a behavioral as well as experiential vacuum. Our challenge is to respond to this void with healthy and holy experiences.

A compulsive masturbator is caught in a discouraging circle: the more masturbation is done, the more difficult it becomes to control and stop. Good intentions and will power are not enough, for in a sense the body has a will of its own. Suppression, mortification, and sublimation of sexual desires as well as integration of sexuality with spirituality are essential in reducing the strength of habit. Ultimately, this person must admit that a part of his or her life is out of control and must surrender in a structured and consistent way to God's saving and healing grace. The remote rewards of the Kingdom can become progressively

nearer and soon replace and become more fulfilling than the immediate gains of masturbation.

It is also helpful to chart recurring patterns. We may discover consistent times and places when and where masturbation is likely to occur as well as feelings or moods that regularly precede masturbation. Knowing that we are more vulnerable at certain times, in certain places, and in certain moods can help us to monitor and care for ourselves. For example, some people masturbate when retiring to bed or during the middle of the night. Many of these individuals slow down both physically and mentally only when they go to sleep. If so, daytime periods of relaxation may make them less vulnerable at night. Or perhaps bedtime is the only time they are quiet enough to listen to their loneliness or to hear their repressed or disembodied selves yearn for recognition. If so, a more balanced, open, and embodied life-style is called for. Restructuring one's life during the daytime hours will help at night.

If we masturbate, we should also discern the kind of guilt we feel. We ought to have more than superego guilt, which is dependent on breaking a rule. Some superego guilt is necessary at times, but when it is our only guilt, we are less than adults. Perhaps we are still children who follow the letter of the law, or maybe we are adolescents who judge reality in terms of absolute ideals: it is either good or bad, meaningful or meaningless.

We should strive to develop a mature sense of guilt. We should be guilty for masturbating not primarily because we break a rule or are less than perfect but because we are becoming less than we realistically can become. Rather than focusing primarily on what we have done wrong, mature guilt calls us to seek a better life.

A basic problem is that many of us simply do not feel at home with our sexual selves. Although we may be able to give a lecture about sex, we are really not in experiential harmony with our sexuality. In fact, intellectual knowledge can be a defense against personal growth. But verbalizing our sexual stirrings to ourselves, God, and others via monologue, journal, or conversation can help us become familiar and more at ease with our sexuality.

Many of us, married as well as celibate, know less than we think we know about sexuality. Good texts on sexuality should be read and discussed. Simply knowing the facts and possibilities helps. Remember, however, that many books on sexuality present questionable values and that some are simply immoral in parts. Moral values should be distinguished from empirical data. Books and articles that strive to integrate the sexual and spiritual are especially recommended.

Books are usually more helpful toward personality integration than movies, particularly those movies that portray sexual intercourse, masturbation, and other forms of erotic behavior. Movies pressure you to move at their pace, whereas books give more leeway to assimilate at your own tempo. More important, the graphic illustrations are often prejudicial according to age, sex, race, and situation. For example, rarely do such movies depict elderly couples. Furthermore, these movies are often sexist in that they emphasize a male model of sexuality.

Most important is that such graphics can play havoc with one's unconscious desires and fantasies. People who watch and discuss these movies can give themselves and one another a false impression of openness and security. Intellectually, these individuals appear to be dealing candidly with reality, but their unconscious and affective lives may tell a different story. They may discover that after the aura of openness has vanished, images and desires engendered by the genital graphics emerge in dreams, fantasies, and interpersonal relations. With good intentions, they thus hinder rather than help their sexual lives.

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A general goal is to create a theory of sexuality that helps us to grow and that is congruent with healthy and moral norms. To seek a vision that serves and fosters life is the challenge. Actually, all of us have implicit theories about sex, but they remain assumptions and consequently unavailable to critical analysis and the process of emergent truth. We should make explicit our implicit assumptions and perpetually test and improve our vision of what our life as a sexual person can and should be.

To view masturbation as a challenge for spiritual growth, we must listen to and learn from the uncomfortable feelings that often underlie and motivate masturbation. Feelings of disembodiment, fatigue, loneliness, boredom, and depression are telling us something about our lives. Instead of silencing their message, we should listen to their invitations to grow holy as well as wholly. We should strive to see the Spirit that is hidden behind the mask of masturbation. Rather than remaining only with ourselves, we should listen to the call of the Spirit of sex to go beyond ourselves.

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# MOTHER-DAUGHTER REMNANTS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

JANET RUFFING, S.M.

I am a woman who hears voices and replays scenes inside her head, vivid memories and impressions from childhood and from experiences in religious life. I often wish I had the strange gaps in my memory that many of my friends report in theirs—but I do not. Instead, I have images and traces of conversations that refuse to disappear. From time to time, these remnants that belong to the young girl in me erupt into my present consciousness and plead for fresh attention. In my struggles to say "yes" to recent changes in my life I have had to hear these voices out again. Feminism has helped me to hear them differently: I have found an important way of coming to understand myself as a woman who bears within herself tensions inherent in a society that still refuses to admit women to full personhood.

My voices often seem to be the introjected ecclesiastical and secular expectations and limitations set by our society for women. When I began to interpret these voices against their societal background, feminism enabled me to see that what I was perceiving to be a struggle with my religious community was merely one version of the common struggle on the part of contemporary women to define themselves differently. I believe that we women religious can claim opportunities from feminism for grace and transformation if we can free ourselves from the culturally defined limits that have been set for us. In the reflections that follow, I would like to explore some of our common ground as women, to look at one way of describing our constricting fears, so that we might develop

confidence in our capacity to re-imagine our way through these impasses.

Nancy Friday, through her book *My Mother, Myself*, led me to engage in more than two years of reflection and discussion on the influences of the mother-daughter relationship on other relationships. This book awakened a chorus of voices from my past that seemed to be on the side of choosing security instead of challenge, voices within my religious life experience that carried the traditional patterns of female expectations in church and society. I had come to value in myself what was useful to the patterns of community life and ministry. I had forgotten or neglected those aspects of myself that did not seem to fit but now wanted a place to thrive.

## CHILDHOOD RELATIONSHIP PERPETUATED

Friday contends that most women are still concerned with unfinished business related to mother-daughter relationships. She asserts that our emergence into a fully autonomous identity requires the working through of unresolved ambivalences in this primary relationship. The entire book is a reflection on the initial symbiotic condition:

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"An infant needs an almost suffocating kind of closeness to the body whose womb it so recently and reluctantly left. The technical word for this closeness is 'symbiosis.'" Most women in our culture have been socialized to maintain this symbiotic childhood relationship for a much longer time than men have been.

Because many women have inadequately completed the early-life process of separation, it is common to transfer symbiotic styles of being to relationships with both men and other women as well as to social groups or institutions such as religious communities, the church, or business corporations. This issue of inadequate or incomplete symbiotic nurturance and its resolution is an invitation to work to examine our relationship with our own mothers with the greatest possible honesty. Moreover, I think that exploring some of the common transferences we experience in religious life (despite more than ten years of attempting to restructure our communal forms on a model other than that of mother-daughter) will enable us to enhance rather than inhibit one another's human development.

## JESUS INTENDED SEPARATION

Although most of my reflections will be drawn from experience and tend toward a psychological and cultural analysis, I would like to give a theological context to this set of issues. When Jesus discusses the conditions of discipleship with his followers, he emphasizes the independence and separateness necessary for them:

Do not suppose that my mission on earth is to spread peace. My mission is to spread, not peace, but division. I have come to set a man at odds with his father, a daughter with her mother, a daughter-in-law with her mother-in-law; in short to make a person's enemies those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than me is not worthy of me. He who will not take up his cross and come after me is not worthy of me. He who seeks only himself brings himself to ruin, whereas he who brings himself to nought for me discovers who he is. (Matthew 10:34–39)

Earlier in our religious lives, we may have applied these words of Jesus to the disruption of familial relationships that entrance into religious life occasioned. We did separate from our families; we did experience being at odds with our culture and sometimes even with our friends. Those closest to us often did not understand and could not wholly support us in our decision, even though they loved us.

I have come to understand a deeper meaning in these words of Jesus, words that we often manage to forget or to treat as merely figurative. The call of

Jesus is to a radical form of personal and communal freedom, a freedom that only comes into being when we can effectively separate ourselves from the "oughts" and "shoulds" of our familial archetypical relationships. It is ultimately Jesus who invites us forward into a life of discipleship and intimacy, causing us to transcend the limitations imposed on us by our initial family configuration and cultural milieu. This separation from our internal complexes as well as from the collective expectations of society is described in Jungian terms by the concept of individuation. It is a process that both happens to us and requires our conscious participation.

The series of divisions in the lives of the disciples is occasioned by the new demands Jesus brings. The old rules of social relationships no longer hold. The disciples followed him, listened to him, and now they are called to invest themselves in his mission, a mission that will lead to hardship, disappointment, persecution, and a full sharing in Jesus' life. Although the disciples are commissioned as a group, each is required to respond individually. It is the diminishment of this capacity for individual responsiveness that I would like to explore in relation to the specifically feminine problems of symbiosis, separation, and competition. These problems represent the sometimes misunderstood, and even discouraged, attempts of women in religious life to achieve the necessary level of autonomy that makes a life of service and surrender possible.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXCURSION

Once I started distinguishing the voices in my past that discouraged me from risking separation and achievement, I also began to hear the same kinds of inhibiting voices in conversations with other women. I began to wonder how much we reinforce this particular set of feminine patterns within religious communities. At the time, I was planning to begin doctoral studies; I was also trying to understand why it had taken me so long to realize that this was an appropriate and desirable course of action for me. Within my congregation, few women had been encouraged to pursue advanced degrees. Among those who had attained them, there was a history of difficult readjustment after studies or else departure from the order. I had successfully taught high school for a number of years and felt many strong bonds with the women who had shared this ministry with me. I did not want to become a misfit. Yet I had to come to terms with my gifts and desires, the unmistakable direction in which God seemed to be moving me, and their apparent disharmony with some of the perceived goals and values of my congregation. If I went to graduate school, I would be initiating a process of separation leading to an unpredictable outcome. Yet I did not feel that opposition was necessary between my new ministerial goals and my



fundamental choice of religious life. I needed to find a way of being true to myself and to religious life as well. This process was frightening, exciting, painful, and challenging.

This tension became easier for me to resolve when I realized that one of its sources was rooted in conventional feminine attitudes existing in my community. Advanced degrees—and the ministry that would necessarily follow—did not seem to fit the typical role of women in the church. The need for us to train our own theologians had not risen to a conscious level, nor were we as a group yet questioning the continued dependence of women religious on theology produced by men alone. I began to understand that what I was experiencing as a conflict between my own desires and goals and those of my congregation was not as personal as I had first imagined but was a conflict shared by many women whose self-definition no longer fit their society's. Unfortunately, most women have internalized these societal expectations and unconsciously impose them on one another. Reading feminist literature has helped me to interpret my experience in this light and enabled me to become more compassionate and less frustrated.

### **SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

While preparing this article, I gathered together a small group of women religious to share their stories. We were all graduate students in theology and living apart from our religious communities; we all had dealt with the mother-daughter re-

lationship in its transference to our communities, but our conversations revealed the great diversity among our experiences.

What is this symbiosis that manifests itself in the lives of many women religious? Nancy Friday offers this explanation:

"It is especially important for women to understand the meaning of symbiosis because for so many of us, it becomes a lifelong way of relating. Very early on, the young boy is trained to make it on his own. To be independent. As young girls, we are trained to see our value in the partnerships we form. To symbiose."

"At the beginning of life," writes Friday, "symbiosis is of prime, positive importance to both sexes. It begins as a growth process, freeing the infant of the fear of being vulnerable and alone, giving her the courage to develop. If we get enough symbiosis in the beginning, we will later remember its pleasures and be able to look for it in others; to accept and immerse ourselves in it when we find it and 'move out of it again' when we are sated, knowing that we will always be able to re-establish it. We will trust and enjoy love, take it as a part of life's feast—not feel we must devour every crumb because it may never come again. If we do not experience this first symbiosis, we look for it the rest of our lives, but even if we do find it, we will not trust it—hanging on so desperately that we will suffocate the other person, boring him to death."

Friday goes on to describe the initial symbiosis of the fetus in its mother's womb, literally a condition in which the fetus cannot live without the mother.

After birth, the infant slowly distinguishes between itself and the mother, becoming accustomed to the mother's comings and goings in response to its needs. It is this process that establishes basic trust, according to Erik Erikson's theory of development.

Yet, as Friday points out, the legacy of basic trust from our mothers encompasses much more. A woman identifies with her mother; she becomes deeply influenced by the image of her as a woman. A boy will not be so keenly marked by his mother's trust; he will usually take on (introject) his father's sense of trust along with being influenced by his early symbiotic experience with his mother. With our mothers as role models for us as women, we may have problems: if they "are not separate people themselves, we cannot help but take in their anxiety and fear, their need to be symbiosed with someone. If we do not see them involved in their own work, or enjoying something for themselves, we too do not believe in accomplishment or pleasure outside of a partnership. We denigrate anything that we alone experience; we say, 'It's more fun when there's someone else along.' The fact is we're afraid to go any place alone."

When we sisters discussed these qualities as we felt them in our religious lives, most of us agreed with this statement made by one of our group: "I think when we come into religious life, not after college, maybe, but after high school, just as we put our identification with mother as a child, we put ours with the community. I think in doing that we never come to our own identity, never grow to the security of listening to the life within ourselves. I think this has to happen for religious life to evolve." Another woman described the societal images we have internalized in this way: "I think women have been trained, conditioned in society, to image themselves in relationships. I am the mother of . . . the wife of . . . instead of *I am*. All of us have to cope with the problem of emergence out of these traditional images of women and the expectations of our own culture."

#### SEPARATION NEEDED FOR IDENTITY

The transference of a symbiotic style of relationship to one's religious community is common, especially among younger women. During the initial stages of formation and the first few years of ministry, we tend to become identified with the community. Our partnership relationship is with the congregation as we adapt to its life and ministry. Eventually, however, if we are to become fully self-actualized women, we will find it necessary to separate our personal identity from submersion in the group.

Friday gives several checkpoints or symptoms that may suggest when relationships in adult life have become symbiotic. For example, in decision making, one experiences a problem in choosing between security and satisfaction. This indicates a

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poor ability to take risks. A symbiotic woman takes the first job that comes along, being willing to relinquish creative and challenging possibilities for seemingly reliable security. She is unable to imagine herself being alone or independent even for relatively short periods of time. Finally, she has very little energy left to cope with her current life situation. In addition, her relationships often exist only at the lowest level of common interests for fear of breaking the bond with her partner or group by asserting her individuality and unique interests.

In religious communities this pattern manifests itself in women who are unable to seek new styles of ministry even after they are no longer challenged by the kind in which they have been competent. Others find excuses for not taking available sabbaticals or time off that would leave a vacuum in the secure patterns of their lives. Some are fearful about venturing into an activity that others in the community may disapprove of or not be able to share. Often, a sister's ambivalent feelings, though not always apparent, surface as tensions in her relationships with other women in the community. Women, more than men, seem to fear that if they enjoy personal achievement somehow their relationships with others will be weakened. The deep fear is that if I am myself, I will lose the nurturing I want.

Friday suggests: "Another place to look for clues as to whether we may still be overly tied to mother is in our relationship to men, to other women, and in our approach to work." If we find ourselves experiencing "the need to cling, fear of loss, the inability to push forward and/or compete" with any degree of intensity, these symptoms might suggest

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## **"I found respect when I became independent . . . Ceased to rely so desperately on others for my own happiness"**

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a look at our mother-daughter memories when we are feeling stuck or trapped.

These issues, which are internal and psychological, are often complicated by societal norms. They can also become confused with gospel values, which invite us to be self-giving, self-sacrificing, self-forgetful, and concerned for others more than for ourselves. Moreover, while I want to hold on to these values, I am often humbly brought to admit that I cannot give away a self I do not have. This self-sacrificing kind of love presupposes a stage of personal and spiritual growth that is possible only after having established an identity that is not based solely on a partnership.

### **SEPARATION FOR LOVE**

I think it is important to keep in mind, since none of us had a perfect mother, that each of us has a certain degree of growing and understanding to accomplish in our lives. We need not concern ourselves with whether our mothers were perfect but only with whether they were adequate. Friday poses the question in this way: "Have the two of us loved each other in the early years and separated in the latter so that we allow each other room, air enough, freedom enough to continue to love?" I think we can fruitfully reflect on this question in relation to our religious communities as well. Do our expectations of one another and our structures create a social situation in which most of the members may freely love one another?

This experience of relational freedom can be described in several ways. One is by contrasting adult relationships with the earlier symbiotic form of

relationship. Friday notes that "if women are able to attain separation through therapy, we see a dramatic difference. There is a sudden burst of energy, of creativity. And we see this in their lives, their work, their sexuality."

After listening to many women religious talk about what a year off for study has meant in their lives, I would say the following comment was typical:

The description of low-energy and low-intensity relationships fit me perfectly the years I was teaching elementary school. But when I went to study for a master's degree in Canada, I experienced a sudden burst of energy. I was myself. I was more than a nameless "sister." I no longer felt I was being stuffed in a mold; I was able to test out what I really could do without all that pressure, yet in a very competitive situation, mostly with men. I could be myself where it wouldn't be a huge thing reflecting on the community.

In her autobiographical reflections, *Changing*, actress Liv Ullmann describes the sharp contrast in her life before and after the separation phase. About her preseparation period, she says, "I have spent hours completely involved in what I thought other people wished to see me doing. The fear of hurting, fear of authority, the need for love have put me in hopeless situations. I have suppressed my own desires and wishes and, ever eager to please, have done what was expected of me." This penchant for pleasing and doing what is expected has been reinforced in us women over and over again, by other women, ourselves, and society in general. If I have grown up learning to value myself only in relationships, then I have probably become quite skilled at finding the pleasing response to another's expectations.

One finds much less depression and more hope in Ullmann's description of becoming separate: "I made better contact with others. I found respect when I became independent, ceased to cling. Ceased to rely so desperately on others for my own happiness. Demands and expectations on other people's behavior, in order to make me secure, vanished. Not quite. Not forever. But I never reverted to the old state. Sorrow turned—if you like—into joy. I think some experiences are less frequent now, but I live a more harmonious life."

### **MINISTRY REQUIRES INDEPENDENCE**

Abandoning reliance on others to make us feel secure is significant not only for the way in which we respond to our communities but for the way in which we act in ministry as well. In mature relationships the separate person is free to seek closeness, communion, and union—and is free to part again. The relationship is not based on a mu-

tual clinging need for another in order to be oneself. Ideally, the same kind of separateness, which Ullmann describes as enhancing to interpersonal relationships, is essential to ministry if our ministry is not to be self-serving. If we as women are involved in ministry because we need the other to be ourselves, need another to be dependent on and attached to us so that we can feel close, do we have any business imposing ourselves on someone else's life? On the other hand, if we can stand in our own space like Jesus, "knowing whence he came and whither he was going," aware of who he was, we can evoke that same kind of awareness in those with whom we work and live.

The separate (independent) person is not afraid to be intimate and does not use experiences of intimacy as a form of domination over another. This person can appreciate people for their distinct otherness, for the unknown in them, for the peculiar mystery of God revealed in the other and not in oneself. A woman can appreciate herself even when the girl in her refuses to die. She can strive, as Ullmann does, "to learn the way . . . To find peace, so that I can sit and listen to what is inside without influence."

### INDIVIDUAL VERSUS COMMUNITY NEEDS

An issue that emerged repeatedly in our discussion group was the tension experienced between our individual growth and our communities. The difficulty of reentry was a problem for some of us after having been away on study sabbatical for a year. Because we returned to our communities with a new sense of self, a new identity, and an enlarged capacity for relationships, most of us found we had to assert ourselves continually to be viewed as our new selves. At times we struggled with authority figures over the issue of ministerial options.

We all acknowledged that there will always be some degree of tension between the needs of individuals and the needs of the larger group. The community may fear autonomy in its members. The extent to which this dissonance is felt may be indicated by the community's efforts to require everyone to merge with the group in a stifling conformity. In communities that offered a wide range of ministerial and living options, the individuals seemed to feel valued more for themselves and less in relation to the projects of the community. By them, this tension was scarcely felt.

On the other hand, if the community experiences a strong tension between the needs of individuals and the needs of the group, the nature of the group might bear closer examination. Is the group so symbiotic in its style of relating that it distrusts any movement toward autonomy? Does the community perceive itself able to value diversity, or does it only accommodate members who are willing to merge, to belong to the group in a compliant fashion, who will not seriously question the modus

operandi of the group? Is the community able to question previous structures, works, or economic arrangements that restrict the members' opportunities to tolerate diversity in life and ministry?

### OTHER MOTHERS FOR ATTACHMENT

This tension between dependence and independence characterized by the union and separation phases of development also has expression in larger ecclesial and societal structures. Not only can the community respond to its members in the fashion of an unseparated mother, but the church, local parish, or school can function in the same way. There is a big difference between institutionalized dependency and the kind of freedom that operates when one chooses to cast in one's lot with others. If one is separate, one can move on to the next task, the next relationship, the next job. Arrangements are negotiable and not determined solely by whoever is on the mother side of the relationship. Docility and compliance seem to be a greater problem for women than for men in this kind of situation.

Institutions tend to be on the mother side of the equation, Mother Church included. The institutional church seems to prefer that we stay in our accustomed roles by encouraging us to remain within church-dominated works rather than to work in a more secularized environment. It would prefer to continue a system in which women religious are expected to do only what the official hierarchy wants us to do. One of the tensions in the contemporary church is the shift of some women religious away from these easily definable structures and the contractual relations that go with them. This movement signals a recovery of a characteristic common to the foundation of most religious institutes, which was the attempt of the foundress to address a situation or need that was being ignored by the status quo arrangements of either church or society.

The division mentioned earlier, which Jesus' proclamation announces, may not only be from familial patterns but may refer to the institutional church, a religious community, or a diocesan structure. Any of these may be the mother or father or mother-in-law from which the Lord calls us to divide ourselves, not in the service of ourselves but in the service of the gospel. For a religious community to be effective in implementing its vision, it too must have a sufficient degree of autonomy to actualize the gospel proclamation without the threat of crippling restraints being imposed by the structures within which the members operate.

It seems clear that economic arrangements are part of the problem in balancing the needs of the community with the needs of individuals. In communities where women are receiving salaries above the usual "sister salary" and parish benefits, the congregation is able to provide more adequately for

the individual needs of members without undue conflict. Other communities are dependent on the income derived from the near-subsistence level of living built into the parish structure. Of course, this is no easy problem to resolve. But the fact that many religious orders of women are dependent on the institutional church to sponsor their work financially creates a structure of powerlessness that makes it difficult for these communities to fund the ministerial projects they see needed. It also weakens their ability to respond to the needs of their members.

### COMPETITION AMONG WOMEN RELIGIOUS

In addition to the ambivalence over the pattern of union and separation rooted in the mother-daughter relationship, female competition poses another problem. Nancy Friday sees the jealousy and competitiveness that first exists between daughters and mothers continuing in women's relationships with other women. Many have the nagging feeling that if they succeed in something important or creative they will lose the nurturance from the group or from a partner in a relationship.

This attitude tends to color relationships between women in many subtle ways. One of these is the avoidance of evoking jealousy or hostility. An example of avoidance behavior in a graduate school setting is the woman who is making good progress on her dissertation and decides she can no longer talk about how her work is progressing with women whose work is going more slowly for fear of alienating them. Another manifestation of avoidance of jealousy is a pattern of maintaining a "low profile" by downplaying competencies rather than allowing them to be resources for the group. Women may be highly competitive with one another yet unable to admit they are competing. Underneath the experience of competition is the fear that if I win I cannot also enjoy a positive relationship with the woman I defeated. Risking competition with other women often means the risk of alienating myself from those women.

Competitive women often say they prefer the company of men to that of women. Within the male world, men are trained for competition. They learn that if I lose today, I may win tomorrow. Best friends often maintain a friendly competitive rivalry. For men, competition does not necessarily carry the fear of losing a relationship. For women, combined with the fear of losing the nurturing relationship is what Friday calls "the economy of scarcity," which is rooted in the family pattern in which the mother is attached to the only available male. The feelings that accompany a psychological economy of scarcity are often reinforced by actual scarcities of economic resources and limitations of opportunities experienced by women in our society.

In talking in our group about having had more

than the usual opportunities for education and challenge, most of us felt we were something of an exception in our communities. We realized that time away for study or a sabbatical was not a realistic expectation for most sisters. We all felt some degree of guilt in recognizing that we had received what others had and would not. The fantasy from childhood of there not being enough to go around is undergirded in our lives by the real economic scarcity of resources in our communities.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEN

Another issue over which this feeling of scarcity emerged was the experience of women in our communities who had found time for personal renewal in a setting that provided good interactions with men as well as women. Many of the women felt that this opportunity to interact with men as friends and peers was a dimension in their lives that they were going to miss when they returned to their normal ministerial locations.

One woman critiqued the significance of relationships with men in an academic setting:

Almost all of our sisters who study either at Berkeley or Weston say that experiences with men are among the most important elements of the experience. It is an opportunity for relationships and a form of separation to achieve identity. However, I wonder if it can't also be the psychological trap of feeling one is dependent on men for an essential aspect of identity. That then becomes the reason why it is difficult to leave study to go back to community.

Although relationships with men can become an alternate form of inappropriate symbiotic interaction, the opportunity to develop relationships with both men and women provides an occasion for negotiating Erikson's developmental stage of intimacy. Many women I have talked to have experienced difficulty within their ministerial situations in finding other women and men who share a similar range of intellectual and personal interests. One woman stated that she had been teased about being a "priest fancier" because she used to enjoy talking with the clergy who came within range of conversation. She said she simply presumed other women were not interested in the same things she was, and it took her quite a while before she began to discover that she was wrong. However, for many who have enjoyed gratifying relationships with people outside the usual convent setting, the return to their home environment is difficult because they find fewer men or women there with whom they are able to interact in a comparable way.

The exchange between men and women religious in renewal programs has proved to be growth producing for both groups. It has allowed religious to

# **Women need to be free of the suffocating feeling of belonging that demands so much time, attention, and psychic energy**

learn from one another and to discover that their experiences and problems in religious life are not always identical. In many ways this type of association of religious women and men from different parts of the world and different congregations has tended to produce a broader vision of life and ministry in the church—a vision that is more inclusive, mutual, and collaborative.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN**

My relationships with male religious have enabled me to understand that part of the difficulty in women's communities comes from women's attitude toward socialization and is not necessarily a problem with religious life itself. Whereas most men take for granted a certain availability of educational opportunity (because that has been a high priority for them for many years), some are either unable to afford further education or they have come to view themselves in roles that do not require advanced educational preparation. Moreover, men are usually expected to develop a certain level of independence, which is valued by the group. For women, "belonging" can sometimes seem more important than the excitement and challenge of achieving, competing, and contributing to a larger world.

At this moment in history it seems necessary to be aware of these differences. Since men are trying to attend to the value of intensifying communal bonds, they can easily think the same is desirable for women. However, women need to be encouraged to free themselves from the suffocating feeling

of belonging that demands all of a person's time, attention, and psychic energy. Whereas many women need to become separate and free from pressures built into the structuring of community relationships, men may need to experience the more vulnerable side of close relationships.

A difference between men's and women's views of autonomy and partnerships frequently shows up in the experience of ministerial teams. Men are conventionally socialized very early toward independence; as boys, they find themselves different from the mother and are encouraged to leave her behind and set out for action in the male domain. Men may be more skilled at maintaining independence than in forming partnerships. On the other hand, women are usually taught to maintain their relationship with the mother as well as to maintain other interpersonal bonds. As adults, women may be more skilled in maintaining partnerships than in sustaining an independent self-awareness. Ministerial teams often experience the tensions created by these differences. Whereas priests are more used to working alone than within a team, many women religious often prefer a team situation. However, these women are often frustrated and confused when their expectations about team functioning are not met.

More frequent interaction with men is, I believe, one source of consciousness-raising for women accustomed to a single-sex situation. This interaction challenges women to question and to think so that we can imagine rejecting whatever part of the "formula female" we have internalized in our socialization with women, which we tend to enforce in one another. A heightened awareness of the differing effects of socialization can enable us to be more objective in interpreting our experiences and to support both personal and social change.

## **INDIVIDUATION NOT EASY**

The struggle women are undertaking today to move toward a truly individuated personality in the face of both social constraints and internalized fears should be understood within the larger context of the ordinary fears shared by all human beings. Such individuation is not an easy process. Women have simply had less practice standing alone and less encouragement to do so. This is still true despite the actual experience of most women in our society, which includes periods of profound aloneness, especially in old age.

Our life stories seem to be a pattern of unions and separations, or of births followed by deaths and rebirths. Each successive experience of union and separation, or birth and rebirth, has the power to evoke the old fears and anxieties, the hostilities and jealousies from earlier events in our lives. Because women seem to have had more difficulty in achieving and maintaining the separation phase, it is not surprising that this phase of development

# The movement toward self-assertion is anxiety-ridden because it involves the breaking of the communion in which self-worth is nourished

currently requires conscious attention in order to support individuation. Yet the successful negotiation of this stage is a prerequisite for genuinely self-transcendent religious and ethical experience. I think it is very easy for women to confuse self-destructive surrender to another person or group with the more profound self-surrender to the in-breaking of God in our lives announced by the gospel. We will always be destined to fall into a symbiotic form of relating until we have gone through the process of forging a personal identity that allows us to love others as much as we love ourselves and to be fully creative, generative women.

## FEAR OF DEATH MOTIVATES

Passage from one stage of spiritual growth to another is always a risky business. The temptation entailed is the classic one of preferring safety to the risk of the unknown. But a threat stands on either side of the tension. Our fear of life keeps us safe while our fear of death pushes us forward. Either way there will be anxiety and at times guilt. In an article in *Theological Studies* (Vol. 39, No. 4, Dec. 1978) on the art of believing, Joseph Powers, S.J., summarizes psychiatrist Otto Rank's view of human life as "a story of unions and separations in which the self-assertion is both grounded and threatened by the surrender of will to community, but is still experienced as a need of one's deepest nature." Rank saw both movements, toward self-assertion and toward community through will, as traumatic. The movement toward self-assertion is guilt- and anxiety-ridden because it involves the breaking of the communion in which one's self-

worth is experienced and nourished. Similarly, the movement toward communion is laden with guilt and fear because one sees in communion the extinction of self-assertion, which can be the deepest experience of being alive. Hence, Rank speaks of two anxieties: the fear of life (self-assertion that could leave one completely cut off from the community) and the fear of death (absorption of the self-asserting person in communion).

## VALUING SELF AND FREEDOM

I am no longer surprised by the voices that express these anxieties inside me. I have heard them in the anxieties of many women around me for years. And I have heard the voices in society that prefer women to be dependent rather than autonomous. As I choose to listen to the newer voices of my feminist sisters and all those who support women in their struggle to achieve full personhood, I struggle to value myself and my freedom and encourage others to hear these same voices.

These are voices that call attention to conflicts like the ones explored in this article—and to the ambivalent nature of the mother-daughter bond and many of its unacknowledged disguises. They are voices that offer a new vision of social reality and call us to make choices about our lives. As a woman religious, I want to hear the voices that can enable me to respond to Jesus and the gospel with greater freedom and maturity and that can free us as communities to be about the work of the kingdom of God in our midst.

To move through our own stories of unions and separations, or passages of liberation, requires a faithful response to our life experiences and to the way God's presence impels us to move beyond the successive idols we manage to create in place of Transcendent Love. Religious life, lived communally, is meant to foster an awareness of the presence of God's Holy Spirit evoking, beckoning, enticing each individual and community into the future that lies mysteriously in God. Insofar as we constrict these movements toward creative identity, we deny a foundational purpose of religious life, the intimate following of Jesus that includes both personal salvation as well as prophetic ministry. We denigrate the individual at the risk of subverting the entire possibility of community. It is only when individuals are courageously and faithfully able to overcome fear and distrust that true community can be born.

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IS THERE A

# DIFFERENT DRUMMER?

CHARLES REUTEMANN, F.S.C., Ph.D.

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

**F**or anyone living in community as sister, brother, or priest in the last ten years, one of the more frustrating experiences has been watching with equanimity the gradual lessening of numbers in one's congregation. Not only is it a discouraging and even frightening experience to see peers and dear friends pack up and move on to other calls, but there are so few who come to take their places, so few bright young faces that radiate the energy and joy of taking up the cause of the group. Prayers for good vocations ascend daily in community as each member tries to view all this with the eyes of faith and follow the Master's injunction, "The harvest is

good but the laborers are scarce. Beg the harvest master to send out laborers to gather his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38) But the years go on, the heavens remain closed, and the future appears to hold little change.

Much has been written and discussed concerning this distressing phenomenon. Sociologists of religious life such as Raymond Hostie (*Vie et mort des ordres religieux*) and Cada and others (*Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life*) call attention to the historical flow of birth, development, decline, death, and rebirth of religious orders. They point out that those orders that survive (a small percentage) have done so under God, because of a transformation of membership and a renewing of cause and that it is this combination that has established stability and attracted new members. Today administrators and spiritual planners, alert to this

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Brother Reutemann, a retreat director and lecturer, is a resource person for the New York Province of Christian Brothers.

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## Ingenious and creative initiatives have been undertaken to acquaint young people with the life-style of religious groups

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historical flow, find themselves working heroically, setting up workshops and retreat experiences, to provide the functional leadership that will update and transform the aging members and call them to the current poignant cause of social justice and service of the poor. Ingenious and creative initiatives have been undertaken to acquaint young people with the life-style and ministry of religious groups. Communities have opened their doors and said, "Come and see! Live with us for a while." Volunteer corps have been organized as adjuncts of religious orders, providing young people with an experience of social ministry within a community context that is animated by the spirituality of the order. A refreshing insouciance has been created in the aging remnant that encourages them to contemplate joyfully the group's extinction, if God wills it, in line with Chesterton's indomitably courageous cry: "You may go out with a whimper, but we shall go out with a bang!"

This sketchy summary of the state of things, with its emphasis on the more healthy generative ways in which some religious groupings are attempting to cope and thus show their concern for the future generation, describes the response thus far to this wasteland of religious and priestly vocations. What else is there to say? Do we dare ask, "Can anything else be done?"

### QUESTIONS ABOUT THE YOUNG

Without attempting to suggest that something else will change all this, is it possible to stand back and look more closely at what is happening, partic-

ularly to the young people? Are they hearing a different drummer? Can we focus more carefully on their religious experience, particularly at the college level? Are there questions that we can ask about their evolving value orientation? About their sense of commitment? About their human relationships? About God in their lives? Closer to the area of our present concern, what do we see happening to those who are thinking about religious vocation in relation to the genesis and flow of this experience? Are they stepping to some faraway music played by a different drummer?

Several years ago Gail Sheehy, the author of *Passages*, wrote an essay for *Esquire* magazine entitled, "Introducing the Postponing Generation—The Truth about Today's Young Men." She canvassed mostly the upper middle class and found among American men under 30 the following expectations and esteemed qualities: they do not want to work hard (though they know someone has to pay the bills); they demand time for "personal growth"; they dream of a balanced life of love, leisure, children, and personal expression; they prefer being loving to being ambitious. She describes their general orientation as being "laid back" (a term taken from the drug culture), that is, "having a lot of nonstructured time and experiencing life as suffused with a soft glow." This seemingly dreamy self-indulgence causes them to postpone commitments consistently, in particular, not having children when it would be economically binding, although children are still seen by the young as the number one source of personal happiness. Sheehy is open to different interpretations, but for her the future is gloomy: "What is truly in jeopardy is democracy." She foresees that these postponing young people will form an unholy alliance with the older conservative members of American society, resulting in a leadership of soft despotism where social justice will be ignored and self-interest will reign. They, "the dominant social classes, will seek to maintain their special privileges at the expense of the general public."

What are we to think of this? How characteristic is it of college and postgraduate youth in American society? How does this affect the matter of our present study? It is not difficult to identify with Sheehy's findings and admit to the large undercurrent of self-indulgent social thinking/feeling in America spawned by our material affluence and its spinoffs: consumer advertising, *Playboy* philosophy, drug and alcohol abuse, exaggerated spectator sports. To get a fuller sense of the social consciousness and orientation of today's young people, one would also have to acknowledge a vague general feeling that the world may well be destroyed by a nuclear holocaust, and therefore it is not worthwhile to plan ahead; the awareness that violence and crime continues to expand from the cities to the suburbs and that one cannot be too cautious about providing for one's own safety; and the rec-

## GAIL SHEEHY'S DARK PREDICTION

1 Young People Postpone Commitment

2 Older Conservative Americans

"LEADERSHIP  
OF  
SOFT  
DESPOTISM"

SOCIAL JUSTICE WILL  
BE IGNORED

SELF-INTEREST  
WILL REIGN

ognition that fringe ways of escaping all this exist: joining the Moonies, perhaps Buddhism, Hare Krishna, or even that small group of religious witnesses in Christianity and Judaism. In the matter of escape, the Moonies have attracted the most attention principally because they demand an ideal of "total commitment in an age of few commitments; a simple philosophy to be accepted on the testimony of one individual . . . answers without questions; wisdom without pain" (Richard A. Blake, "The Attraction of the Moonies," *America* 2:280). However, the Moonies are generally felt to be an extreme fringe, and it is known that they lose one third of their membership every two years.

### PERSONS AND ISSUES ATTRACT

With this as background, and recognizing its influence on the general social ambiance that might be a cause of the scarcity of persons entering reli-

gious life and the secular priesthood, are there any positive and different things happening to college and postgraduate young people that may affect the choosing of a religious vocation? The first thing to be noted, particularly among the few who are still being attracted to religious life, is a different kind of identification. Young people are not identifying with a particular order or even with brother as brother, sister as sister, priest as priest but with a person to whom they feel drawn and who they sense can help them find meaning in their life and help them get closer to God. Initially there may be no special feeling for the religious group as such; however, something is happening in their life that concerns God. There may have been a vague feeling for God from the start, but now it takes center stage, mostly in a conversion experience. Encounter weekends frequently stimulate this conversion. Issues, notably justice, peace, and poverty, also tend to act as a catalyst when candidates go beyond the

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**There is  
no doubt that  
Christ  
and the personal self,  
shared and  
communicated,  
are at the heart  
of community**

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theoretical and begin concretely to help people.

Ministering to the sick or retarded is often a moving experience, acting as a personal conversion catalyst by making one feel worthwhile and like the creator of something beautiful. The effect on the young is strong and automatically demands conversion. Part of the reason for this is that there is an awareness, a consoling belief, that God is present, that he cares, and that he is interested in the ministering person's daily life, in all its messiness. Soon after begins the development of different imperatives: change your behavior, seek the way of peace, sort out your life. These imperatives seem to come from the self, but somehow they also are related to God and the awareness of his presence.

The music of the hidden drummer plays on. Frequently, it is heard alongside a romantic relationship that is strong and engrossing but that also includes some disturbing or unsatisfying elements. From the center of a mix of ambiguous feelings and drives, the question arises: "God, what are you doing to me? What do you want? What are you calling me to? Are you asking me to think of being a sister, brother, priest?" Correspondingly, there is a desire to prolong or intensify prayer. Something more is wanted. A sympathetic adult is asked, "Can you tell me about centering prayer? Can you teach me how it goes?" There is a frantic daily dialogue: "God, I'm all messed up! Where have you been? What are you doing now? What do you want?"

If the relationship with God develops, through prayed feelings, concern about future work, compassionate helping of people in need, the example of others, shared prayer experience, or a spiritual

talk with a sympathetic adult, strange things may begin to happen to one's human relationships. For example, a young man may be going through an infatuation experience. Simultaneously, his relationship with God catches on. Soon he finds himself asking whether or not his relationship with the young woman is freeing, for her as well as for himself. Friendly and sensitive guidance can be most helpful. As one novice, a college graduate, put it: "Two things helped me a lot at that time. Someone directly invited me to be a brother. I felt flattered because I'm not the type to take that kind of initiative. And, then, there was a certain sensitive persistence. I wasn't hounded, but I felt that when I was invited for dinner with the community of brothers at Christmas time, I wasn't being lost sight of, I was being offered a permanent way of life, if I felt that it was for me. I appreciated being kept after; I think that was helpful."

#### **EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY SOUGHT**

Two other areas of young people's experience are of particular significance in the genesis of a religious vocation today. The first is community. It is important to remember that, generally speaking, young people do not experience community on campus, either in the dormitory or in the classroom. The same can often be said of their experience at home, if they are living there. Yet, at this stage of early adulthood, there is a strong hunger for tasting and forming adult community. Is this the reason for the lavish praise of those "gutsy" religious weekends with their peers? A summary of that experience might go like this: "I really felt so strong when the weekend ended because of the people I came together with. There was a level of sharing beyond any other experience I've had. It was a safe place to share, and I felt an urge to share. The sharing had a healing effect, a release from fear and anxiety. When you are with your peers and can really be honest with them, that's a comfortable experience; that's a taste of community."

For those religious groups that are inviting young people to share in their community on a brief or longer live-in basis, it is important here to note what is being praised. It is not difficult for older people to appreciate the fact that the young will enjoy and be impressed by seeing adults live in community and converse, laugh, pray, work, and exchange feelings with a certain naturalness and joy. But this may not be enough for today's person-oriented youth. The music of the drummer is focusing on a deeper level of honest and humble sharing than is generally present in most religious communities. This quality is not easy to pinpoint. Perhaps Carl Rogers comes close when he says in *On Becoming a Person*:

It has led me to believe that what is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably

# FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH TODAY



the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others. This has helped me to understand artists and poets who have dared to express the unique in themselves.

Rogers does not seem to be talking about the matter of "baring one's soul," that much caricatured way of rejecting sharing of any kind. Young adults are looking for people who will talk with them about themselves and their experience, who combine perhaps an acknowledgment of human brokenness with a desire for a true relationship with Jesus Christ as healer and friend. It is significant that Cada and co-authors center on this when they

write about the renewed religious community of the future:

One of the major prerequisites for the movement of a religious community from a time of search and darkness to that of creating a transformed community is the personal transformation among a significant number of people in the community. Transformation here means that the collapsed inner world of meaning is resynthesized through a religious experience which brings about a fundamental, personal conversion and reorientation of life. The most striking feature of this metanoia is a new (in the sense of deeper, broader, etc.)

relationship to the person of Jesus and the gospel message of the Kingdom.

Community is a complex reality, but there is no doubt that Christ and the personal self, shared and communicated with others, are at its heart. It also helps when one truly believes that community is the greatest gift that religious groups can offer to young people in an alienated world.

### **COMMITMENT HIGHLY PERSONAL**

The other area of significance for young people vis-à-vis religious life touches on a theme from the same music: the question of commitment. The "postponing generation" is extraordinarily wary of being tied down, as Gail Sheehy readily discovered. It is not simply that they are similar to Portia's suitor in *The Merchant of Venice*, changing from one relationship to another, from one life stance to another:

God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man. . . . He is every man in no man. . . . If I should marry him, I should marry twenty husbands.

Young people are fairly well unified, though understandably undeveloped. They have a deep-seated fear of closing out their options. As Sheehy puts it, "They are obsessed by what they call 'trade-offs' in life," by questions like: What is being asked of me? What will I get in return? Will it be commensurate with myself and my desired life-style?

True, there is the recognition that there are limitations to freedom and that eventually some painful decisions will have to be made. Sheehy cites the example of one young man whose girlfriend proposed marriage by telephone: "I'm ready to get on with it, or break away," she said. After asking for time, he phoned back later in the day and agreed that he was ready too. Nonetheless, great agonizing and a constant pawing reluctance are involved. Anyone who has worked with college students contemplating religious life will recognize this dilemma. The most troublesome time is that point of decision when they must cast in their lot for a lengthy live-in experience with the religious group.

Commitment is a major preoccupation for all. The vocation prospects who negotiate it best do so when they are able to accept the decisive move as a stepping stone to a greater awareness of God's will for them, of what he caringly wants for them. Commitment as an obligation or rule of the group is not so palatable. Furthermore, the initial experience of commitment is looked on not as commitment for a length of time or to a well-defined state (though these may be in the background) but as a response to a God who responds to them and to people who accept them. Contemporary commit-

**Contemporary commitment is highly personal, no matter how subjectivistic this concept may seem to another generation**

ment is highly personal, no matter how subjectivistic this concept may seem to another generation.

### **GUIDELINES FOR HELPERS**

What can we make of all this? Is it possible to speak of guidelines or points of reference for those who are recruiting, guiding, and forming new ministers for Christ and his church, as all should be attempting, if they wish to exercise their generativity? In recognizing the hazards of oversimplifying and stating the obvious, it can be said that:

(1) Ministry, whether it be at the college campus, high school, or parish, is a valuable locus for contacting young people, particularly when it includes an attractive physical environment for relaxed peer/adult commingling and provides diverse offerings such as shared prayer, liturgy, opportunities for social assistance, seasonal and issue-oriented activities, opportunities for simple counseling and/or spiritual direction, guidance on how to pray, and examples of how to live creatively and religiously. Campus ministry is tremendously enhanced when it is sparked by adult (men and women) campus leaders who possess that special charisma for radiating a sincere, playful, in-love-with-Christ-and-others aura.

(2) There is no doubt that young people welcome the open house policy of religious groups, whether on a short-term (prayer and dinner) or a longer live-in basis. But one caution: the quality of encounter that takes place within the community is crucial.

(3) In the genesis of a vocation, the particular

apostolates of the religious group are less important to the young person than the relationships with members of the group. Young people feel that they can do most anything, undertake any type of ministry. Moreover, they are at a stage when motivation by a dream is a powerful attraction. The corporate dream of the group would be more important to them than the actual work. A religious group does well to keep in touch continually with its corporate dream (while always respecting the personal dream of each member), especially as it makes decisions about particular institutions and apostolates.

(4) The music of today's drummer is highly personal and insistent: young people want a relationship that draws in all the experiences of their daily life—everything. Spiritual direction can be very helpful to them if it focuses on their relationship with Christ in their daily life experiences. There is

possibly no better way to test a call and to shed light on the path to be followed.

Finally, it is important to remember that we all need to maintain a relaxed and cool stance. The Lord obviously knows what he is doing. He also plays at times a pretty wild tune.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Blake, R. A. "The Attraction of the Moonies." *America*, February 2, 1980.  
 Cada, L.; Fitz, R.; Foley, G.; et al. *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life*. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.  
 Murphy-O'Connor, J. *What is Religious Life?* Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1977.  
 Sheehy, G. "Introducing the Postponing Generation—The Truth about Today's Young Men." *Esquire*, October, 1979.

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# Book Reviews

*The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*, by Collette Dowling. New York: Summit Books, 1981. 266 pp. \$14.95.

After years of marriage, Collette Dowling realized that her husband could no longer take care of her and their three children either emotionally or financially. She became independent and established herself as a free-lance writer. But when she entered into a relationship with another man she quickly reverted to her old pattern of caring for his needs and their home and letting go of her independence. Challenged by him in the midst of this regression, she began to write about her inner conflict in women's magazines. Through the articles she received feedback and support from other women experiencing the same problem. She consulted different women psychologists and psychiatrists and received confirmation of her suspicions concerning women's fear of independence. The notion that women want someone to take care of them and some external force to transform their lives is what Dowling calls the cinderella complex. In the course of the book, she offers suggestions of where the complex comes from, what its effects are on women, and how women can "escape into freedom."

Fear of independence starts early in women's lives. Whereas men are trained for self-sufficiency and self-trust, women are trained for dependency and low self-esteem. Dependency creates self-doubt. Because our cultural structures expect little from women, women have a personal fear of standing up and facing the world. Women are taught to avoid

risk, which further prevents them from learning how to confront fear. Dowling found that the result of this socialization process was that women experienced never-ending conflict and anxiety. In her research she discovered that women are characterized by passivity, dependence, and lack of self-esteem. As a solution she suggests that girls be taught at an early age to take initiative and responsibility for themselves and to solve their own problems.

As women try to break away from old stereotypes, they often suffer from what Dowling calls gender panic. This comes from the conflict between wanting domestic security and desiring to be free and self-fulfilled. Gender panic is also part of the new crisis of femininity that has emerged as women find they have no role models for how to be feminine and independent. Whereas traditional roles for women are changing, without role models women must contend with conflict and self-doubts with little or no support from others. An important point that Dowling makes is that women participate in their dependence and oppression because it is safer to be static than to take risks. There is hope, however, because if women can be agents of their subjugation, they can also be agents of their freedom and independence.

Dowling states very bluntly that women are afraid to escape into freedom because it means being alone. They are afraid of being alone because they have been socialized to be in relationships with others and to derive their identity from others. This book faces squarely the problems women encounter as they struggle toward freedom and the various stereotypes women fall into as they fight their way to independence. All of Dowling's findings are supported by qualified psychologists and psychiatrists. The notes, resources, and bibliography all provide excellent material for further study on related topics. The book is lucid and full of solid statistics and helpful insights, though a few of the case studies are somewhat long. I would recom-

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Ms. McLaughlin is currently a student at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

mend a careful reading to any woman who has not yet recognized her own fear of independence.

Dowling pleads with the reader to realize that it is important for women to believe in themselves and to know they can rely on themselves. The examples given are all of male-female relationships and usually marital, but the premise that women seek their identity in others is by no means limited to marital relationships. This is important to remember as structures and roles change in religious life and women and men try to live more simply and honestly with one another and before God.

—Barbara R. McLaughlin

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*Inside Christian Community*, by Rosine Hammett, C.S.C., and Loughlan Sofield, S.T. New York: Le Jacq, 1981. 149 pp. \$15.00.

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Sister Rosine Hammett and Brother Loughlan Sofield have had extensive experience in group work at the Center for Religion and Psychiatry in Washington, D.C., as well as in many dioceses and communities throughout the country. Together they have written a book that contains a wealth of useful information and valuable theory that is interwoven with solid clinical experience and wisdom.

The authors designed their book to be used to instruct members of Christian communities who in turn will stimulate their fellow members to improve the quality of life in their communities. These may be communities of nuns, brothers, priests, or lay persons. Although the primary focus of the book is "to describe group dynamics as they manifest themselves in community living," multiple purposes are clearly spelled out. The authors do an excellent job. A look at the chapter headings gives a clear picture of how they go about it. Topics include: putting the scene in focus, stages in development of community, group dynamics, communication in a caring community, practical aspects of communication in community, working with community groups, and factors that facilitate growth in community.

The book is well organized, and the material is presented clearly and concisely. Group theory and clinical experience are both expressed in language that everyone can easily understand. In general, the simplified language does not compromise or confuse the complex psychological dynamics that are presented and discussed. Only in one small area do I think this method fails, that is, in the opening re-

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Father Murray is a priest-psychiatrist in private practice in Worcester, Massachusetts.

marks about the defense mechanisms of individuals. These are not tricks of the mind but rather intrapsychic dynamics that protect the person against danger arising from impulses or affects. Defenses are not a way of kidding ourselves; they are automatic processes that allow all human beings to avoid or modify conflictual situations. They are not inherently or necessarily pathological.

Who will benefit from this book? Many thousands all over the world are certain to discover its usefulness. A religious superior who wants to learn something of group dynamics and communication will find much pertinent information. Anyone who must decide about having outside facilitators provide a group experience for a community should find this book helpful. Those who want to learn the fundamentals of groups will certainly not be disappointed. As Father Angelo D'Agostino remarks in the preface, "This work is a most effective solace and resource for those who have experienced or may be experiencing the emptiness and loneliness that too often exist within community."

—John T. Murray, S.J., M.D.

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*Contemporary Growth Therapies: Resources for Actualizing Human Wholeness*, by Howard Clinebell. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. 304 pp. \$10.95.

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*Contemporary Growth Therapies* provides an overview of theories and resources that can be used for actualizing human wholeness. Dr. Howard Clinebell, professor of pastoral psychology and counseling at Claremont College, California, postulates that the practice of psychotherapy from ego analysis by Freud to contemporary feminist therapies characteristically pursues the goal of abetting human wholeness. Clinebell organizes the variety of contemporary therapies into five major streams: traditional insight oriented, behavioral/action/crises, human potential, relational/systems/radical, and spiritual growth.

Clinebell, as a result of his experience in pastoral counseling, presents an integrated eclecticism to help others achieve higher levels of human growth. As he provides key insights for growth counseling, he also offers in each chapter the aligned strategies that bring about human wholeness, particularly in the area of spiritual development. Pastoral counselors, formation personnel, and spiritual directors will benefit from his perceptiveness.

Clinebell asks the reader to "let your mind relax and play with these ideas, one at a time." The actual study is not playful, but the experience of learning the possibility of self-actualization can be. His excellent book demonstrates well that growth

resources can be readily comprehended and easily put to use and that this learning process can be enjoyed.

—Patrick J. McNamara, F.M.S.

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*Tellers of the Word*, by John Navone, S. J., and Thomas Cooper. New York: Le Jacq, 1981. 341 pp. \$23.00.

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Much contemporary theology has no immediate relevance to the process of formation in religious life. Theology sometimes seems remote, removed from the concrete reality of helping people to grow as religious, to deepen their vocations, and to grow into the Lord's call to them to religious life. Theology often only examines universal truths; the work of religious formation necessarily addresses particular persons in special situations. The problem is this: speculative theology, in its abstraction and generality, can lead us into unhealthy idealism in the process of religious formation. But how do we distinguish between healthy and unhealthy idealism? Gilbert Keith Chesterton, in his essay "The Appetite of Earth," writes:

If anyone wandering about wants to have a good trick or test for separating the wrong idealism from the right, I will give him one on the spot. It is a mark of false religion that it is always trying to present concrete facts as abstract; it calls sex affinity; it calls wine alcohol; it calls brute starvation the economic problem. The test of true religion is that its energy drives exactly the other way; it is always trying to make us feel truths as facts; always trying to make abstract things as plain and solid as concrete things; always trying to make us, not merely admit the truth, but see, smell, handle, hear, and devour the truth.

A new book on the theology of story, *Tellers of the Word*, by John Navone and Thomas Cooper, does just that: calls us and leads us to see, smell, handle, hear, and devour the truth. Fathers Navone and Cooper present us with a theology of the concrete that not only has application in the task of religious formation but addresses itself to the fundamentals of that apostolate. It does this by pointing out the importance of God's story in our lives. God's story in, not outside, our own lives forms us to the extent that we let it, that we accept it, that we listen to it with our hearts. Not to listen to God's story in my life means my own nonformation, my deformation,

because only God's story can truly form me, create and recreate me.

The theology of story has come to the forefront of Roman Catholic theological concern in the past ten years, especially in the writings of John S. Dunne, John Baptist Metz, and particularly John Navone. *Tellers of the Word* puts the theology of story together for the first time in a clear and systematic way. Its importance for formation in religious life is that the systematic presentation makes it easy to see how theology of story has meaning and usefulness in the formation apostolate and how it lays a theological groundwork for the practice of formation.

The theology of story approaches the human person as fundamentally interpersonal in concrete historical interrelatedness, emotional and affective fullness, friendships and adversaries, memories, familial heritage, hopes, dreams, and aspirations—all related concretely to each other. By taking us in our concreteness to the person of Jesus Christ it teaches us not only to profess the truth, but to see, hear, feel, and taste it.

—Robert Faricy, S. J.

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Father Faricy is a professor of spirituality at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

**Corrections:** In our Fall 1981 issue we stated that the price of *Happy Are You Who Affirm* is \$2.95. It is actually \$5.00. But as Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., in his book review implied, the book is well worth it.

In the article "Becoming Holy and Whole," by Noreen Cannon, C.S.J. (Spring 1982 issue), the correct title of John Dunne's book, cited on p. 39, is *The Way of All the Earth*.

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Brother McNamara is engaged in pastoral work in Jackson, Mississippi.

## Request from a Reader

**W**

e recently received a letter stating: "I've had a request from the General Council to search out any studies that may have been made about missionary response to extended service in Asia, particularly Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Here is the question: Do missionaries who stay on too long grow static, sterile, and rigid? Is there something in the missionary role in that cultural setting that over the years cuts down on creativity, zeal, or vocational energy, leading to a kind of malaise?"

"Are you aware of any studies that have been made, either in that region or anywhere else? So far in my initial research I have found none. Perhaps we'll have to initiate a study."

Perhaps some of our readers are familiar with such a study. If you are, please let us know about it so that we can pass the information along to our correspondent. And you may have some ideas about how such a study could be done—asking what questions, focusing on what issues, and so on. Please send your suggestions along to us, too.

The Editors

# A Letter from God

Dear Son/Daughter,

I want you to live with me always.  
It was I who brought you out of nothing  
so that I could give you life and love.  
Out of countless sperm and ova  
I chose you,  
not because you are better,  
but because I want you to share my joy.

I want you to be an original,  
not a copy of someone else,  
but a unique picture of me.

I want to share my infinite thoughts with you,  
to share my creating,  
to share my loving forever . . . with you.

I want you in my human family,  
to love all the other originals I have created,  
by easing the loneliness of your sisters and brothers.

I want you to see how precious you are to me,  
that I do not create junk,  
that you grow more valuable each day  
in loving me and yourself and others.

I want you to know  
that I sent my only divine Son  
to die for you,  
to take your guilt upon himself  
so that you can stand before me  
forever guiltless.

I want you to know  
my Son Jesus understands the pain you suffer,  
he knows how hard it is to grow in love and freedom.  
So wait patiently with him,  
accept the pain of growing in love.

I want you,  
as my Son Jesus taught you,  
to call me "Abba"—"Dad"

I want you to be with me always,  
not just today  
but to live with me forever.

Your loving Abba,  
GOD

Joseph A. Sommer, S.J.